

THE NATURE OF DEMOCRATIZATION UNDER THE POLISH
COMMUNIST REGIME
1956 - 1961.

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F O R E W O R D

Poland attracted the attention of the whole world in 1956 by its bold and successful stand against Soviet pressure and its determination to follow a "Polish road to socialism". At that time the new leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (Communist Party) under Wladyslaw Gomulka, promised a far-reaching democratization of Polish political life. This process was to affect all spheres and levels of Polish society, but Gomulka himself attached special importance to restoring the Sejm (Parliament) to its constitutional position as the supreme legislative organ, establishing workers' self-government in industry, and democratizing the Party and encouraging extra-Party political initiative. This thesis is an attempt to investigate the execution of this programme and to evaluate the results it achieved.

Since I can not read Polish, I have relied mainly on books and articles published in English in both Poland and the West. I am, however, indebted to Adam Straszynski, who translated some material for me from Polish.

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A B S T R A C T

of the thesis

"The Nature of Democratization under
the Polish Communist Regime 1956-1961"

Democratization, which is the process of deliberately engaging the people in public affairs and increasing their participation in government, encounters a particularly difficult problem in Communist societies. This problem arises from the oligarchical position of the Communist Party, which dominates all mass organizations, controls all spheres of economic, social, and political life, and discourages the growth of liberty and political pluralism. During the post-war period, and particularly between 1949 and 1954, Poland has been governed by such a Party, which derived its authority from Moscow.

After the death of Stalin, the totalitarian grip of the Party was relaxed and compulsion, oppression, censorship, and control were gradually superseded by freedom, toleration, and spontaneity. In this relaxed atmosphere, the Party was unable to maintain its dominant position and it increasingly lost influence to previously suppressed or newly established groups and institutions, especially the Church, the Catholic press, the intellectuals' clubs and other reviving political parties. A movement for fundamental social and political reforms and extensive democratization, which originated amongst a small group of intellectuals and quickly spread amongst the people, eventually won the sympathy of a majority in the Party itself. Early in 1956, the demands for reform became increasingly associated with the rehabilitation of Wladyslaw Gomulka, the deposed Communist leader, who came to be regarded as the only acceptable alternative to the current regime. In October, 1956, a bloodless coup d'etat, effected despite the threat of Soviet intervention, returned Gomulka to power and brought the developing crisis to a head.

On assuming power, Gomulka criticized the failures and abuses of the previous regime and promised to effect a number of basic reforms in the structure and methods of government. He drew attention to three areas in particular. He

thought that the Sejm should be restored to its constitutional position as the supreme organ of state power. The system of industrial government should be decentralized, the workers having some participation in management through workers' councils. The Party itself should return to the practice of democratic centralism and avoid interfering with the work of the government departments. The object of these reforms was to reduce bureaucracy, and make the system of government more democratic and more acceptable to the people. Gomulka emphasized, however, that the Party must direct the process and warned that democratization would not be allowed to weaken the Communist regime.

Even before the change of government in 1956, the Sejm had begun to function more like a genuine parliament. After 1956, legislation was almost exclusively by Sejm laws, although the Party was the effective legislator, its directives forming the basis of most bills. There was little genuine debate on legislation, the general policy of the Party and the principle actions of the government being rarely questioned. The Sejm, however, does exercise some control over the more detailed and procedural aspects of administration through the Supreme Chamber of Control and the committees. The committees, which initiate most legislation, are the most active organs of the Sejm and the only scene of genuine discussion. Besides the P.U.W.P., two other parties, the United Peasant Party and the Democratic Party, are represented in the Sejm, but they have no status of their own. There is also a small Catholic representation, notably the Znak group, whose members are most interesting and the most vital in the Sejm.

Workers' self-government began to function in Poland in 1956 through the workers' councils, which first appeared during the mid-summer of that year. In November, 1956, the councils were legally established by an Act of the Sejm. The main significance of the Act was that it gave the workers the opportunity to discuss the problems of the enterprise and gave them a say in management. But by legislation of December, 1958, the councils were integrated with the Party and the Trade Unions to form a Conference of Workers' Self-government. This law reduced to competence of the workers' councils and, as Party control tightened, the workers gradually lost interest in them. In addition to the workers' councils there was also some experiment with lay courts in factories for the trial of petty crime.

After the revolution the Party attempted to forge closer ties with the masses by interesting the people in its activities. At the same time, the leadership insisted on ideological conformity, disciplined organization, and monolithic unity within the Party. The two aims, however, proved incompatible. As the Party regained its strength and re-asserted its authority, it lost the support of non-communist organizations and the sympathy of the people. Within the Party, Gomulka's programme was criticized by the Stalinist and revisionist factions, both of which Gomulka sought to eliminate. But to Stalinists were so firmly entrenched in the Party apparatus that it proved almost impossible to remove them, except from the hierarchy itself. Furthermore, in his efforts to defeat the Stalinists, Gomulka, for fear of antagonising the Soviet Union and jeopardizing his own position, was forced to deal severely with the revisionists. In consequence, he was obliged, despite himself, to rely increasingly on the Stalinists and to forego his promises of democratization. Thus, although the Party apparatus, which previously exercised absolute control over all levels of the administration, was drastically reduced, the internal democratization of the Party organizations remained strictly on paper.

After the 1956 revolution, Communism in Poland assumed a remarkably liberal and tolerant attitude and many pluralistic and democratic features appeared in Polish society. During the succeeding years, however, the pressure was gradually resumed by the infiltration of non-Party organizations with renewed insistence on Party control, imposition of censorship, and harassment of the intellectuals and the clergy. Five years after the revolution, although all the gains had not been lost, most of the achievements of that unique event had been nullified and much of its promise unfulfilled.

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CHAPTER I

The Problem of Democratization in a Communist Society

Democracy is an ideal and an aspiration. It is a collection of beliefs regarding the ends and the means of political organization based on the assumption that all men are equal and on the conviction that government exists for the benefit of free individuals and that, therefore, self-government is the best government. It is a product of the Age of Reason and the current faith in the rationality and nobility of man, drawing its deeper inspirations from Christianity and the city states of Ancient Greece. Political democracy has fallen far short of the ideal, yet self-government has been and remains one of the most powerful aspirations of mankind in modern times. The history of the last few decades has shown conclusively that men prefer to mismanage their own affairs than to have these affairs well managed for them.

But although the twentieth century has seen a great advance of democracy, and although hardly anyone to-day dares to reject the principle itself, there seems to be little agreement as to what democracy in practice really is. There are various "types" of democracy - parliamentary, presidential, soviet, popular, directed, guided - all presenting themselves as the genuine article. The use of the word democracy to describe most of these systems is only euphemistic and often deliberately misleading and propagandistic. But more important, the criteria on which they generally present themselves as democratic are of a merely formal character, for example, the provisions of the constitution, the electoral system, the number of political parties, etc. Almost all societies to-day pay lip service to the forms of democracy, but the extent to which they are democratic is a moot point. For example, the Soviet Constitution is one of the most democratic ever written, but few unattached observers would claim that Soviet government is democratic in its operation. Communist elections are "no more than a plebiscite by which a whole people puts itself in the power of a small gang".¹ Thus the forms and procedures of democracy persist, while democracy itself is destroyed.

Merely formal criteria are insufficient or even erroneous because democracy is not a system of government or an institution, but a way of life, a style of political behaviour. Of course, certain political arrangements

1 Bertrand de Jouvenal, On Power, p.275

i.e., institutions, are necessary in order that the style of democratic politics can be attained. Perhaps it is because the early democrats outlined these arrangements so clearly that the forms of democracy are often mistaken for democracy itself. Thus, when evaluating the democratic character of a system of government, the actual political practice is more important than the formal provisions because it is only in practice that the scope of genuine discussion, the extent to which government takes or has to take account of public opinion, the real nature of the relations between the people and their representatives and the authorities can be determined.

Although it may be safely assumed that the extent of democracy in communist societies is in practice small, the concrete situation seems to vary from country to country. Part of the problem is that the forms of democracy are there but the substance is, for the most part, lacking. Of course communist governments are not entirely insensitive to public opinion. They must keep in touch with it, if only to know what the people will stand. But for any government or power elite this is a matter of self-interest not necessarily involving any respect for the democratic principle. The process by which public opinion reaches the government in a communist country differs from the process of permeation and pressure from below that is familiar in the Western democracies. Instead, public opinion is organized in a rigid hierarchy beginning with the Party leadership and descending through the intermediate organs of the Party to the activists who work at the grass roots. Thus the process is organized from above in order to discover the trend of public opinion and manipulate it. The post-Stalin agitations and revolts in Eastern Europe indicate that this object was not completely achieved. The risings themselves were important because they brought about significant changes in the relations between government and people. Also as a result of these disturbances, some of the communist regimes attempted to bring a further measure of democracy into the process of government.

This immediately raises the question of the extent to which a communist system can be democratized and remain communist. Here the problem is that policy is made and power is wielded outside the actual governmental structure. The de facto government is by a single party which is not constitutionally responsible to the people. The Party imposes a strict ideological and political control and freedom of association and expression within and outside it are restricted. In addition there is a rigidly hierarchical structure in

all social and political organizations whether these be trade unions, consumers' co-operatives, or youth clubs. Within this undemocratic framework, the opportunities for democratization are few, short of eliminating the features that distinguish communist society. Thus the communist leaders who attempted to democratize their regimes in the middle 'fifties, were in effect, faced with this dilemma: if democratization was to amount to anything at all, it might lead to the collapse of communist institutions; yet, if communism and its institutions were to be preserved (and it was never intended otherwise) there could be very little democratization. This meant that there was only room for democratization in a narrow strip, where the demands of democracy and the practice of communism were compatible.

Although democracy is a very intangible thing, and its institutions are not uniform, its presence or absence may be recognized. There are many significant differences in the structure of government in Britain and the United States, both systems have their shortcomings, yet both are considered democratic. In fact democracy, being an ideal is always beyond complete realization. It is but a model of perfection, a guide to achieving the most in practice. But, given that perfect democracy is impossible, it is reasonable to expect the fulfillment of certain conditions if a political system is to be considered democratic. Democracy requires that the ruling social elites should be subject to the control of the people, and that there should be competitive elections to make possible a choice of governments and programmes. It also requires that there be continuous open and informed discussion of alternative policies and leaderships, and that the government in power be sensitive to the opinions expressed in this discussion.

Thus, the minimum requirement of democracy is that the government has the consent of public opinion and that the policies it implements are in accordance with the expressed will of the people. To give effect to this principle, public opinion must be organized and expressed in such a way as to have some influence and control over the governors. To increase the possibilities of this is the aim of democratization. It is the process of organizing the participation of the people in public affairs, engaging their interest, and opening avenues of expression.

When talking about democratization, it is helpful to bear three distinctions in mind. First, there is an important difference between democratization in a society which already has democratically functioning

institutions, and one which does not. Compare, for example, England at the turn of the nineteenth century and contemporary communist societies. Early nineteenth century England was governed by an oligarchy, but within that oligarchy the principles of parliamentary government and individual freedom were already well established. By contrast, the modern communist oligarchies are not only irresponsible, they are autocratic. This means that the machinery of democracy has not simply to be extended, but has to be introduced from the beginning. Second, one should distinguish between democratization within the government and administration, i.e., decentralization and devolution, and democratization at the roots, i.e., bringing more people into participation in government. As has been suggested, the structure of communist government is inimical to such participation. Finally, it is necessary to distinguish between political and social democratization. Political democratization means making the people sovereign and increasing the extent of free and equal citizenship. Social democratization, which is quite common to-day, merely means satisfying the more material demands of the people, for example, by an increased supply of consumer goods, by an increased availability of education, by increased participation in controlled cultural activities and mass organizations, i.e., by giving the appearance of social equality and equal participation, while leaving the essential problems of politics and power untouched.

These distinctions are at the very core of the problem of evaluating democratization in a communist society. Since the object is to make the government not only responsive, but responsible to public opinion, the principle question is whether the government will submit to popular control and not just make social and economic concessions in lieu of genuine democratization. The problem is further complicated by the attitude of the ruling elite, that is, the Communist Party itself, which is coloured by the conviction that it has been historically chosen for the task of leadership, and that the people, that is the working class, has to be educated to a "correct" outlook before it can assume the roles of self-government. Thus, in brief, the specific problem of democratization in a communist society is whether the communist governmental machinery can be adapted so that the majority of the citizens, acting freely, have an effective say in the decisions that have to be made, and control over those who actually make them; whether the people, as distinct from the ideologically weighted "working class" can play a significant role in communist society.

The term, public opinion, is generally employed to designate the people in their political role. The importance of public opinion in democracies has been recognized for a long time, but students of politics are now aware that it also plays a part in non-democratic regimes, even if it does not control the government. It is not easy to define public opinion or to determine when a public opinion exists. There are two general conditions. First, public opinion must be genuine, that is really public, which is not always the same as a majority opinion. Suppose, for example, that in a communist country a clear majority of the Party were in favour of a certain plan for the national economy, this opinion, even if arrived at by a free vote after open and thorough discussion, could not be a public opinion. This is because, even if its views were taken into account, the public at large did not participate in the discussion and the Party is not representative of the people, and any way in which it happens to be representative is quite random. But even the opinion of the majority of the whole population may not be a public opinion. If the minority feels so strongly about its position (for example, on the teaching of religion in schools) that it cannot simply agree to disagree with the majority, then there are two or more public opinions, not one. Thus although a genuine public opinion must be based on the majority view, the minority must be prepared to abide by the will of the majority, and the majority must respect the minority's position. Otherwise government is by coercion, not by consent.

It is not only necessary that public opinion should be really public, but that it should be a real opinion. An opinion involves a considered judgment, that is, a judgment made after dealing with facts, experience and other people's comments. This means that there are many matters, mainly technical, on which most people can have no opinion because they cannot assess the material. Thus there is always a small percentage of opinion that always matters more because it is better informed, more authoritative, or more influential. Again, it is only an attentive minority of the people who are informed, interested, and engaged in public affairs. Then intensity of opinion also matters. A small minority feeling passionately about something may be able to carry a majority with them, or at least persuade a sufficient number not to object to their considered opinions. This roughly is what happened in Eastern Europe in 1955-1956, when a small circle of intellectuals infected the whole society with their views and ideas.

The important thing in practice is that public opinion should be effective. An effective opinion may not include the whole population, as half of the people may be uninterested or ignorant of the issue. Then the opinion with which the government has to reckon, may be the careful, well-informed opinion of an interested few or of a dissenting section of the social elite. In communist countries, public opinion has, in most cases, only been able to make itself effective when such a division has occurred in the elite, that is, in the Party itself. Of course, effective opinion, especially in communist countries, need not be well informed and may judge unwisely, even when information is available. Furthermore, public opinion is not necessarily careful. It may be uncritical and unrestrained, swayed by emotion, rumour, and "mob sense". This presents a danger to democracy anywhere, especially where the institutions are weak or the elites are insecure.

Imperfect as it may be, the idea of public opinion is closely concerned with the idea of democracy. But if it is to be consonant with democracy, it must be able to form freely. This in turn depends on the extent to which there is freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of the press, and is inversely proportionate to the scope and severity of censorship and the degree of ideological and political conformity expected by the ruling class. In the West, these elementary freedoms are considered important in themselves, but they are also of practical significance anywhere because public opinion is formed in numerous unorganized ways - in restaurants and pubs, in factory canteens and village market places, on long train journeys and at any number of casual social functions, indeed wherever there are people gathered together.

Amongst the forces actually shaping public opinion, are the various social institutions like clubs, professional associations, trade unions, learned societies, where there are people with similar problems, interests and attitudes. The more there are of such societies and the more lively they are, the more vigorous and influential public opinion will be. If they are allowed to remain ideologically and politically independent, they can help to stimulate valuable social attitudes and to develop the habit of interest and activity in public affairs. Democratization implies greater freedom for such independent societies, for political and social criticism and for publicly expressed opinions.

Until the advent of mass media, public opinion could only be organized locally or amongst a small educated and mobile upper-class. To-day however,

public opinion is mainly formed by the instruments of mass communication, notably the press, radio and television, and the cinema. As these are generally organized, they give to a few - in communist countries a few government or Party officials - an immense influence on the opinions of a whole people. Unfortunately, also, despite their capacity for encouraging thoughtful interest, they generally appeal to emotion and prejudice. If mass media were to perform a truly democratic function, they would provide the public with reliable information and varied comments on which to base its own political judgments. In this connection, much can be done by the press, not only in presenting the facts and the background to the news, but in informing people of their rights and presenting the various points of view in controversial matters. The press, however, is not read by all the citizens and, in communist countries, is subject to varying degrees of control.

Radio is an immense force in moulding public opinion, whether used by Moscow, the B.B.C. or an East European government. One talk may reach more people than a thousand pamphlets, and a few good broadcasts may swing the opinion of a whole nation. Yet, in communist countries, the liberty of the air is almost completely denied except to the officially favoured viewpoint.

As against mass media, which play such a large part in shaping immediate opinions, education is more important in the long term, because it determines people's outlook and their mode of thinking about problems. It determines how they approach political issues, how they react to news and events, how far they are critical or uncritical. Education helps people to evaluate facts and make sensible judgments. It is therefore important that education should develop a questioning attitude, that it should be varied, and free from doctrinal bias. This is most important when political thinking is done within a narrow ideological framework, but it is then least likely to be achieved.

If all the means of forming public opinion in a modern society, social and political organizations, mass media and education, are to be controlled by one authority, the government, then there can be no hope for democracy and no opportunity for democratization. Nothing that can be called public opinion can develop, if all information and comment can come from only one source. And there is absolutely no question of public opinion, inasmuch as it can be so called, having any effective control on the government because that opinion is just what the government in power chooses to make it.

Public opinion is a positive and determining force only if it is organized. If it is unorganized, it remains vague and dissipated and cannot hope to control the government. Often public opinion is organized in the same centres as it is formed, namely the various voluntary organizations. But the principal means of organizing political opinion is the political party. Political parties draw people together, concentrate opinions and sort out conflicting views. Their role is to clarify complex issues and present them more simply for the popular verdict. They also make possible a measure of intercourse between government and people. The people can keep track of central policy, and the government can keep in touch with public opinion, through the local branches.

But the greatest value of the party system is that it enables people directly and simply to choose a government. Then responsibility for political action is pinned down to a specific group of elected politicians. This principle, however, is not accepted in communist countries. Political parties are regarded by the communists as an expression of the class conflicts of bourgeois society. When society unites in a single common purpose, that is "building socialism", competition among political parties becomes irrelevant, and the Communist Party is left alone in the field. This, clearly, is a profoundly undemocratic attitude; it is no more than a crude rationalization of the narrow interests of the Communist Party. Further it is an attitude which permits the suppression of criticism and minority opinions beyond the point where it can be justified by any theory. The system as a whole rests on the assumption, not only that the people want more than anything to build socialism, but also that they support everything else that the Party stands for.

The Communist Party system poses enormous problems in bringing public opinion to bear democratically on government. Public opinion comes to bear on government either as an unorganized whole, or through the leadership of various organizations. A single party system heightens the importance of these non-political organs of public opinion, but it also inhibits them. This is especially true of a communist society where, although associations are allowed, they are not allowed to become effective.² In fact, all important

² Significantly, non-party organizations have flourished in communist countries only at times when the Party itself is weak and divided, or has lost the initiative. This was the case with the Intellectuals' discussion clubs in Poland, etc. in 1955-1956. They became the equivalent of "political assemblies in which important issues were debated and attitudes crystallized. From their sessions emerged ideas which gradually reached the populace". Z. Bzrezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, p.240

organizations in communist countries are joined together in a "united front" associated with the Communist Party and, therefore, with the government, a feature which almost eliminates the possibility of organized pressure from below. The absence of a legal opposition is also a serious restriction on democratic expression and responsible criticism. Opposition within a party is much less effective, and is almost non-existent in the Communist Party, because of its structure, rules of procedure, and disciplined conformity. Further, the Party may be run by a small, dictatorial clique or become a stepping stone for professional politicians concerned with their private ambitions more than the public good. Thus the Party itself is the greatest limitation of the opportunities for democratization in a communist society.

If the single party system has to be accepted, it is even more important than usual that its internal organization be democratic. In the Communist Party, much could be done in the way of democratization and to prevent the Party from becoming merely a machine. All branches could hold regular meetings and do as much as possible to enlist local support. Elections, including those of branch offices, could be conducted democratically and votes made in secret. In central policy making, the opinions expressed at all levels could be taken into account, and there could be close liaison between national offices and local branches to avoid misunderstandings. In debates at all levels, discussion and argument could be encouraged, all criticism seriously considered, and majority decisions accepted. Regional conferences, national executive meetings, and national congresses could be held regularly and their proceedings made public. New membership could be enlisted without any bias with regard to person or, within limits, belief. At elections, the Party could not only give an adequate choice, but also give the electorate a reasonable opportunity to estimate their qualities. Finally, the Party could try to satisfy the reasonable demands of the people, and try to interest the people in its activities, encourage discussion, and agitate for the democratic acceptance of its policies. This would provide a framework for some degree of democracy in a one party system, provided the Party could represent the people as well as lead them.

One of the problems of democratization is passive citizenship, which is not peculiar to communist societies. But in communist societies, there may be no alternative to passivity. For those who are quite unable to

arouse enthusiasm for the Communist Party there is little choice but to withdraw from politics. But, even for Party sympathizers, there is often not much incentive. No one can accept for long the repetitive exhortations and moralizing persuasions of Party leaders as a valid motive in politics. Thus people react to the distorted ideological dogmas and the stereotyped opinions of the Party and retreat into indifference and apathy. Thus, for communist and non-communist alike, there is little incentive to take an active part in politics. It would be difficult to estimate how much interest is stifled and how much apathy is camouflaged in this situation, but it is probably safe to assume that it is considerable.

This obviously is a serious handicap to democracy. It would be indeed difficult for a Communist Party to permit a substantial measure of democratization without resigning its supreme power, the *raison d'etre* of its existence. In recent years, however, there has been some decentralization and devolution in communist countries, usually in the cause of efficient administration, but sometimes as measures of genuine democratization. Particularly in Poland, the communist regime attempted some degree of political democratization without sacrificing the position of the Party. There were some experiments in grass roots democratization in government and industry, and even the Party itself showed a readiness to keep in touch with the people. This Polish experiment is important in itself as an essay in democratization and because of the peculiar circumstances in which it developed. But it has a much wider significance as an indication of the extent to which democratization is feasible at all under a Communist Party regime.

CHAPTER IIThe Crisis of a Communist Regime: the Movement for
Democratization in Poland

In a process of democratization there are two elements: firstly, the demands of the people for a share in government and for more of the material things of life; and secondly, the concessions of the ruling class to these demands. In communist countries there was little chance of such concessions being made in Stalin's lifetime. Indeed, such was the dictator's power and the people's demands, far from being heeded, were rarely even heard.

Stalin's death at once removed the outstanding figure of the communist autocracy and weakened the authority and will to power of the communist parties in the satellites. It thus removed the greatest obstacle to democratization and eventually much of the people's fear of the regime. At the same time it uncovered an enormous accumulation of political and economic problems and grievances and released pent-up forces which demanded their redress. It was soon clear, although not everywhere immediately, that Stalin's successors could not rule the Soviet Empire as he had done, with complete disregard for the masses. From now on, communist government would have to be on a different basis, one that took some account of the opinions of the people.

During the Malenkow interregnum, there were signs that a new course was indeed being taken. Most of the satellite governments made economic concessions especially to the formerly harassed middle class. It appeared that more attention was being paid to the standard of living and that a greater measure of moral and intellectual freedom was being allowed. Political changes were purely formal, however, the only one of major significance being the accession of Imre Nagy to the premiership in Hungary in 1953. In the same year in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the expectation of change, combined with new injustices suffered especially by the workers produced a crisis and the suppressed discontent of a decade suddenly erupted in mass outbreaks of violence in Berlin and Plzen.¹ In Poland, where the new course was implemented very cautiously at first, the people greeted such concessions as were made with relief and reserve rather than animation. True to form, the first signs of change were an admission at the

1 Not only did the workers not benefit, they suffered even further. In Czechoslovakia, a currency reform of May, 1953, destroyed their personal savings while in East Germany an increase in work norms which became effective before the concessions were made was not repealed. In both countries there were nation-wide demonstrations of protest (especially violent in Berlin and Plzen) which were suppressed by military force.

Second Congress of the Party in March, 1954, that the results of the economic plan were disappointing and a pledge to raise the standard of living by 15-20% in two years.² Also at the Congress an amendment was introduced into the Party rules, giving official endorsement to the principle of "collective leadership", Beirut became First Secretary of the Party, the position of Party chairman having been abolished, and resigned his position as prime minister to Cyrankiewicz. But this was only a nominal change. Paradoxically, Poland, which was perhaps the least Stalinist of the East European regimes, experienced an increase in police terror after Stalin's death.³

Nonetheless the New Course did strike a responsive chord in Poland, not least in the Party itself. The Swiatlo revelations and events in the Soviet Union, notably the execution of Beria, stimulated a restless and censorial mood in the Party and produced an atmosphere conducive to free speech and more outspoken opinions. Latent dissatisfaction and suppressed apprehension came to the surface and the Party leadership, faced with an unprecedentedly critical and resentful membership, was thrown on the defensive. At a meeting of Warsaw Party activists in December, 1954, the conduct or policy by the Politburo was severely attacked and its methods condemned, although the legitimacy of the regime itself was not questioned. Apparently this meeting so alarmed the Party hierarchy that even the fact that it took place was kept a close secret and only released by Ochab two years later.⁴ At the Third Plenum of the Central Committee in January, 1955, Beirut was moved to admit certain short-comings of the Party namely, "the lack of collectivity in Party leadership, the violation of the

- 2 The slogan of the Congress was "We must raise the standard of living", yet it was admitted that investment in consumer goods in 1955 would be less than two-thirds of the planned investment for 1953. The programme announced also proposed a tighter control over local government and a "relentless struggle against the kulaks". For a fuller discussion see M.K. Dziewanowski, The Communist Party of Poland, An Outline of History pp.236-40
- 3 In May, 1953, nineteen high-ranking Army and Navy officers were executed and Cardinal Wyszynski was arrested in September. During the summer anti-clerical propaganda had been intensified and a series of articles attacking the Church appeared in Trybunu Ludu, some of them contributed by Eduard Ochab.
- 4 Bzrezinski, The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict p.238

principles of democracy inside the Party, the ignoring of criticism and self-criticism, and the use of bureaucratic methods".⁵

As a result of the Swiatlo affair and the protests which it aroused within the Party, the powers of the police were reduced, and in 1955, there was a remarkable growth of freedom in Poland. Even Trybunu Ludu, the Party daily was able to attack "the false notion that political wisdom is concentrated in the narrow circle of the higher Party organs".⁶ The misgivings revealed by Party members were soon assimilated by non-Marxist opinion and were an encouragement to the intelligentsia and intellectual youth who, compelled to silence during the Stalinist period, now embarked on a systematic criticism of the regime and even the basic principles of Marxist doctrine. Their criticism found expression in the press, notably Po Prostu, and in the intellectuals' debating clubs of which there were over 200 in Poland by the autumn of 1956.⁷

Despite Beirut's half-hearted attempt to make amends for the past at the Third Plenum, the government steadily lost initiative and ability to act in the months that followed. The majority of the Party leaders soon lost touch with the public debate which gained a momentum of its own and came to embrace every aspect of economic, cultural, and political life in Poland. Dissatisfaction grew deep among the workers and Party functionaries found it increasingly difficult to cope with their tasks, while their ideological authority was weakened by the wide gap between theory and practice. While the weakened police apparatus was no longer able to keep surveillance over the population, criticism of the government and the demands for democratization were intensified. As the agitation mounted and spread and grievances were more openly expressed, the foundations of the Stalinist edifice were gradually undermined.

The campaign of criticism had been continuing for more than a year when the news of Krushchov's denunciation of Stalin was received in Poland and the effect was to bring the smouldering crisis to a head. Gomulka later described the reaction to the Twentieth Congress in the following words:

"An animating sound current went through the Party masses, the working class, the entire society. People began to straighten their backs. The silent enslaved minds began to shake off the poison of mendacity, falsehood, and

5 Konrad Syrop, Spring in October p.25

6 Trybunu Ludu, February, 4th 1955. Quoted by K. Syrop, op.cit., p.25

7 According to Bzrezinski, pp.cit., p.140

hypocrisy. The stiff cliches previously predominant on Party platforms and at public meetings as well as in the press began to give place to creative, living words."⁸

Although some official versions⁹ say that the dawn of the enlightenment and indeed democratization itself date from the Third Plenum, the validity of Gomulka's pronouncement is that it was only as a result of the national reaction to the Twentieth Congress that the Party became really alive to the popular mood. Previous to that the Party, under the grip of Beirut and Berman, had taken only very cautious and inadequate measures to alleviate discontent. Although aware of the unrest in the country, it had been surprised and a little puzzled by the unfamiliar phenomenon of free and critical discussion and had no clear idea of how to deal with it.

In the months that followed the Twentieth Congress, a number of important conferences gave a clear indication of the new vitality of public opinion and the direction it was taking. At the Nineteenth Session of the Council of Culture and Art, Antoni Slonimski boldly asserted that:

"Freedom of speech guaranteed by the constitution cannot be a plaything in the hands of anonymous officials. We must give back to words their meaning and integrity we must clear the road of all left-overs and of the whole mythology of the era of fear.... Only a true democratization of public life, restoration of public opinion, and the return from fideism to rational and unfettered thought can save us from Ceasarism."¹⁰

After the death of Beirut, which occurred soon after the Twentieth Congress, two factions emerged in the Party, representing its "conservative" and "liberal" wings. The division had been incipient at the time of the Third Plenum but while Beirut remained in control there was little opportunity for open manoeuvring. The effect of the Twentieth Congress was to encourage the liberals and underline the increasing isolation of the Stalinists. Although

8 W. Gomulka, Address to the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, October, 20th, 1956. A translation of the address has been published in P.E.Zinner, National Communism and Popular Revolt in Eastern Europe (a selection of documents)

9 For example Cryankiewicz in an address to the Sejm: "the deep political activation of Polish society began during the time of our Party's Third Plenum...", and the Resolution of the Seventh Plenum which began: "The decisions of the Third Plenum... have opened a new era in the life of the Party and in the development of the political situation at home.", and which consistently refers to the Third Plenum as initiating reforms.

10 Zinner, op.cit., pp.53-54

the Stalinist faction, whose chief spokesman was Zenon Nowak, was still opposed to democratization, the more perspicacious leaders sensed the uncompromising mood of the people and realized that their demands could no longer go unheeded. Even such confirmed supporters of the regime as Ochab and Zambrowski realized that a change of course had become inevitable and sought to break through their isolation from the people.

At the spring session of the Sejm in April it was apparent that the government had been following the general discussion and was aware of the state of public opinion. In his prime minister's address, Cyrankiewicz welcomed the public debate and paid tribute "to the splendid vitality of the increased activeness, criticism and sense of political responsibility of the widest masses."¹¹ The volume and the basic direction of the discussion at public meetings and in the press showed that "a never-ending national conference of political activists on the problems of socialism"¹² was taking place. Although there were some "improper words" and "hasty conclusions", the important thing about the debate was its general direction and the atmosphere it had created. Indeed, Cyrankiewicz described the debate as a maturing of Polish democracy, "the growing up to the requirements of people's democracy, in the best meaning of this term".¹³ He was sure that it was an expression of lasting transformations.

The prime minister recalled the Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U. which had exposed unhealthy distortions in the system, distortions like the cult of Stalin, "which broke the norms of democratic rule, norms inseparably linked with the very sense of the socialist system."¹⁴ These norms had to be restored, but he reminded the House that such a process could be based "solely on drawing the widest peoples' masses into the process of ruling the state and the construction of socialism."¹⁵ Cyrankiewicz pledged that:

"We shall mould this process, this difficult and frequently painful, yet creative process, founded on the faith in the sound common sense of the masses and on the best and most resolute understanding of our ideology in a more conscious form."¹⁶

11 Zinner, op.cit., p.88 A translation of the address has been published verbatim in Zinner, pp. 84-123

12 Ibid., p.91

13 Ibid., p.87

14 Ibid., p.90

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p.87-88

He thought that socialism had never had such deep roots in the consciousness of the masses and invited "the vigilant reaction of public opinion to each violation of binding laws and civil rights."¹⁷

Cyrankiewicz, a former socialist and, therefore, not one of the proven Stalinists, was at this time recognized as leader of the liberal faction in the Polish Party. Owing to the uncertain situation in the Party following Beirut's death, he had probably gained more authority and freedom of action than the position of prime minister normally bestowed. But even if his personal authority be doubted, his words are at least a reflection of the trend of opinion in the Party hierarchy.¹⁸

In the spring of 1956, the "liberal" faction of the Party rapidly gained ground over the Stalinists. The decisive moment was in March when Ochab became First Secretary of the Party and authorized a policy of concessions. Accordingly, the wages of the lowest paid workers were raised and the censorship of the press was relaxed, granting a degree of freedom previously unknown in a communist country. In April, an amnesty bill approved by the Sejm, secured the release of 30,000 political prisoners and the reduction of the sentences of about 60,000 others. Further proceedings for political crimes were suspended and, in a new purge of the security police, Romkowski and Fejgin, the head of the infamous Tenth Department, were arrested. Also in April, Ochab, speaking to a meeting of Warsaw Party activists admitted the errors of the past and made some general promises of democratization.¹⁹

These general promises and vague recantations could not satisfy the people who were becoming increasingly bolder and were soon demanding improvements in their material conditions. A major clash with the regime occurred in Poznan on June 28th, when the workers of the Stalin Locomotive Works in the city went on strike in protest against an increase in taxation and a simultaneous cut in wages. The workers marched through the city to stage what was intended to be a peaceful

17 Ibid., p.98

18 At this time Cyrankiewicz' authority may also have been enhanced by a split between the Government and the Party similar to the contemporary split in the Soviet Union. See "Poland: the Search for Independence" by Alexander Korab, Problems of Communism Vol.V, No.6

19 According to C. R. Hiscocks, Poland: Bridge for the Abyss? p.183

demonstration. They were joined by hundreds of the citizens, the demonstration became unruly and soon got out of control. The crowd raided the Party offices, wrecked the local jamming station, and even invaded the Secret Police Headquarters and the city jail. Firing broke out and the demonstration assumed the proportions of a minor uprising. Fighting continued for two days until it was suppressed by armoured security forces from outside the city, by which time it had taken a toll of 53 dead and over 300 wounded. Although the Party was deeply alarmed by the incident, it pretended at first that it was the work of foreign agents. In a broadcast to the people of Poznan, Cyrankiewicz said that the "provocation was organized by the enemies of our fatherland" and issued a severe warning to any who might be led astray.

But it was soon clear that the Party had actually been chastened by the experience. About three weeks after the revolt, Ochab told the Seventh Plenum of the Central Committee that "the Party and the Government had not done everything in their power to help the workers", that their efforts were "not energetic enough and not always consistent".²⁰ He attacked the soullessness of the authorities and proposed that closer links should be forged between the Party and the masses.²¹ The resolution adopted by the Central Committee at the end of the session said that Party organs and Party activists, especially in the provinces, had become detached from the working masses because of their "inability and sometimes even dislike of implementing the Leninist norms of Party and social life."²²

The resolution was a clear indication of how much the attitude of the Party to the public had changed. It was conceded that the press had made a substantial contribution to the process of democratization and had justly criticized the distortions of the past. The Central Committee undertook to make amends and put right these ideological and political distortions, which had resulted from the cult of personality and associated deviations from Leninism. At the same time, it was recommended that the Party, while directing the process of democratization, should endeavour to introduce a socialist consciousness into the people, thus "overcoming gradually, but consistently, anarchistic, petit-bourgeois tendencies

20 Quoted by K. Syrop, *op.cit.*, p.59

21 C. R. Hiscocks, *op.cit.*, p.195

22 Zinner, *op.cit.*, p.149. The whole text of the resolution is published in Zinner, pp.145-185

and utopian opinions detached from the concrete set up of political forces."²³ But it was also important that there should be changes of attitude and organization in the Party itself for there could be "no democratization of the country without democratization of the Party which leads the country."

In a wide ranging and remarkably forthright survey of the economic situation the Committee agreed that the miscalculations and failures of the Plan were a main cause of the widespread discontent and would be a serious handicap to the Party in the creation of a more populist image. "In the first place, the process of democratization, of enforcing Leninist norms in Party life, and of making good the bureaucratic distortions initiated by the Party is being carried out in a situation in which a feeling of disappointment has accumulated, particularly among the workers and the working intelligentsia, as a result of unfulfilled hopes for a genuine improvement in living standards."²⁴ It was now granted that the Poznan revolt which had previously been attributed to the sinister machinations of imperialist provocateurs, could not be treated in isolation from the situation in the rest of the country. Indeed it "set for the Party the task of carrying out a profound evaluation of the sources and causes lying at its foundation."²⁵

The Seventh Plenum, a landmark in the development of the Party's attitude to democratization, was also of major significance in the factional struggle. During the session, which lasted the unusual length of ten days, the old Stalinists, notably Nowak, Rokossowski, and Mazur, stubbornly opposed the Party's new policy of limited concessions. They felt that the Ochab-Cyrankiewicz faction had learned the wrong lesson from Poznan which really showed that relaxation could only lead to anarchy. But the majority were dissatisfied with the government's record and appreciated the need for a certain measure of liberalization to make the regime more acceptable to the people. Finding their cause defeated, the reactionaries voted for the resolution, thus implicitly condemning the principles which they had sought to uphold.

23 Ibid., p.146

24 Ibid., p.147

25 Ibid.

During the summer the resignation of some of the more unpopular members of the Politburo and the government ²⁶ testified to the rapidly growing pressure for change and showed that the communist regime in Poland was facing a serious crisis. The intelligentsia and the intellectual press, continuing relentlessly to expose and criticize the failures and excesses of the government especially in the Stalinist period, were now reinforced by the support of an impatient and increasingly articulate working class and the sympathy of a majority in the Party itself. The weakness and disorganization of the Party apparatus was evidenced by the spread of independent workers' councils, established with disregard or even defiance of the Party and Trade Union organizations. Although the Party leadership itself was more radical since the Seventh Plenum than it had ever been, it was not yet radical enough for the masses who were clamouring for more genuine and more basic reforms. In face of these implacable demands, the Politburo was forced to consider the return to power of Wladyslaw Gomulka, who had been rehabilitated at the Seventh Plenum and had become a kind of unofficial "leader of the opposition", and a symbol of the campaign for reform. The campaign reached a triumphant conclusion with the election of Gomulka to the Party leadership and the final collapse of the Stalinist resistance, in the peaceful revolution of 19th October, 1956.

Thus communism in Poland passed through its most serious crisis without bloodshed. This "October revolution", which had brought the country to the brink of battle, had been anteceded by unprecedented agitation and a chain of significant contributory events. Its deeper roots, however, lay in the bitter and long-standing grievances of the people. For communism in Poland, whatever it may have had to its credit, had brought the people only economic hardship, political repression and immense misery. Now the Party had to face the fact that after twelve years in power, it had failed either to win the loyalty of the population or to break its will. But the widespread hatred for communism was directed, not so much at communism itself, as at the Stalinist regime under which it had been imposed. The knowledge that a concrete alternative to the regime existed, only added purpose and vigour to the numerous demands for change which were all condensed in the recurrent demand for democratization. This demand issued, not

26 Among them were the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Justice, Culture, State Farms, Motor Industry, and Engineering. Also two of the deputy premiers, Jakub Berman and Hilary Minc resigned in the course of the summer.

simply from dissatisfaction with the personalities of the Stalinist clique, but from a unanimous rejection of the whole political system which had grown up in Poland since the war and a rebellion against the police terror, economic oppression and bureaucratic tyranny which went with it.

By the summer of 1956, the liquidation of the state security apparatus was nearly complete. During the Stalinist period it had almost become a state within a state and had earned the unyielding hatred of the whole population for the injustices and brutalities it committed. The secret police or Urząd Bezpieczeństwo (U.B.) was the chief weapon of the regime in the "sharp intensification of the class struggle" which accompanied the building of socialism in Poland. It hunted and prosecuted the "class enemies" and the "provocateurs", fabricated their crimes, and extorted their confessions. If the crimes could be proved, the U.B. had no function because the suspects could be tried in the ordinary courts. It seems that popular insecurity maintained by organized terror was regarded as the basis for the security of the regime.

Apart from the excesses of the secret police, the main cause of public hostility to the communist regime in Poland was its prodigious mismanagement of the national economy. At the termination of the Six Year Plan in 1955, Poland had accumulated a foreign trade deficit of 179 million dollars (a surplus of 246 million dollars was planned) and an enormous loan debt to the Soviet Union. Despite a harsh labour discipline, or more likely because of it, productivity in 1956 was the lowest since 1918. The majority of the people were no better off than before the Plan and many were much worse; all were bored to exasperation by the hollow exhortations, unfulfilled promises, and statistical lies of government and Party officials. The prevailing mood was summed up by a Silesian mine-worker, spoken to a reporter of the New York Times "We are getting tired of working for the next generation".²⁷

But despite managerial incompetence, wasteful duplication, erratic supply of material, bottlenecks, and uneven rates of growth in different sectors, the Plan was successful in its main objective. At the cost of enormous investment, estimated at 25-30% of the national income,²⁸ the output of capital goods was

27 Dziewanowski, op.cit., p.270

28 J. M. Montias, "Unbinding the Polish Economy", Foreign Affairs, Vol. 35, No.3, April, 1957.

nearly trebled between 1950 and 1955. In this period also, industrial employment increased by over 60% and total national output was growing at an annual rate of 13%. In the fruits of even this partial success, however, the mass of the people hardly shared at all. The concentration of investment in the heavy industries left few resources for light industries and consumer goods.²⁹ The claims of the defence industries went far beyond the expectation of the Plan. During the years 1951-1955, investment in the armament industries amounted to 11% of total industrial investment, or more than all the investment allocated to the light industries during the period. Hilary Minc, responsible for economic affairs during the Six Year Plan said that defence efforts "took the best available resources - steel sheet, roller bearings, tubes, precision machines, the best technicians they were a considerable burden on the economy and one of the main factors responsible for the non-execution of the Plan targets for the standard of living."³⁰

Although personal consumption increased by 30% from 1949-1955, this was not a true reflection of the actual situation. In his address to the Sejm in April, 1956 Cyrankiewicz admitted "that there are numerous groups of employees and workers who, during the Six Year Plan did not experience at all, or only to a minimum extent, an increase in living standards."³¹ This was perhaps an understatement, because the index of real wages actually fell during the Plan³² and by 1956, many people were living on the borders of subsistence. The strikes and demonstrations which occurred all over Poland in the summer of 1956, the Poznan

29 In Poland during the Six Year Plan i.e. between 1950 and 1955, 46% of total gross investment was in industry. Of this, the heavy industries - i.e. engineering, chemicals, metal industries, fuel and power - accounted for 82%. The remainder was distributed as 6% in building materials, 4% in textiles, and 8% in other light industries. Figures taken or computed from "The Polish Economy since 1950", Tables 2 and 3, United Nations Economic Bulletin for Europe, Vol.9, No.3, November, 1957.

30 Nowe Drogi, No.10, October, 1956. Quoted in the "Economic Bulletin for Europe", Vol.9, No.3, P.26, Note 14

31 P. E. Zinner, op.cit., p.101

32 In 1955, the last year of the Six Year Plan, the average monthly wage at 1956 prices was 224% of 1949. The cost of living index was 228% of 1949. The index of real wages was 98% of 1949, i.e. a 2% drop on the index for 1949. Figures from "The Polish Economy Since 1950", Table II.

riots, and the October revolution itself were the outcome of the failure of communist planners to consider the masses in an age of "fundamental democratization."

If vocal opinion in Poland was frankly critical of the mismanagement of the national economy, it was perhaps even more concerned with the enormous government bureaucracy which, after the fall of the Stalinist hierarchy, became the chief obstacle to democratization. This bureaucracy, whose administrative authority rested on force and contempt for law, arose after the consolidation of Stalinism.³³ From 1948 onwards the Polish economy was clamped into a system of Soviet-type centralized planning, although it was questionable whether centralization along Soviet lines was suitable for Poland where private enterprise and modern business techniques were far more developed than in post-revolutionary Russia. Nevertheless, new personnel, committed to Soviet methods were appointed to all key position in the government and the nationalized industries and they prepared and enforced the Six Year Plan, which was to be the foundation of a Polish "economic miracle."

In the history of government in Eastern Europe, bureaucracy has an age-honoured place as the fourth power of government. But in Poland in 1956, the bureaucracy had become the government and the bureaucrats did not believe it was possible to govern without innumerable restrictions, directives and balance sheets. The bureaucrats assumed legislative functions and their legislation, which affected every aspect of Polish life, did not even require the formality of ratification by the Sejm. The composition of the bureaucracy was the chief reason for bad government. It was poorly staffed and politically appointed, the main qualifications being proletarian origin and devotion to the Party. In the autumn of 1956, only 15% of factory managers had higher education, 45% had secondary, and 40% had primary or no education at all.³⁴ The proportions were similar for deputies, departmental officials, and Party apparatchiki. Consequently the

33 Before the Stalinist period in communist Poland, i.e. 1944-'48, the economy was directed by a Central Planning office, staffed by economists and civil servants educated in the Western tradition.

34 Figures given by Kazimierz Grzybowski, "Reform of Government in Poland", in the American Slavic and Eastern European Review, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1958.

majority were unable to act without being led by the higher level of the administration. Few had any idea of the duties involved in their jobs and the grandiose economic plans surpassed their intellectual capacities.

The State Planning Commission was at the head of the system of state management of the economy. It had legislative and administrative powers and a network of agencies and inspectorates to plan and supervise the operation of industry. As its power waxed, it impinged on the economic ministries which in turn restricted the powers of the individual enterprises and local councils until in the end the system contracted a kind of paralysis. Jerzy Urban, a young journalist, commented on the situation in 1956: "Everybody, from the worker up to the chairman of the State Planning Commission, knows that something is wrong, but they just shake their heads helplessly, unable to act, unable to break out of the magic circle." ³⁵ Innovation was stifled, Western technology was neglected in favour of Soviet developments, money and time were often wasted in duplicating research done elsewhere. Soviet methods were slavishly followed despite the fact that Poland's small resources could not stand the enormous waste which these methods entailed. The Six Year Plan encountered numerous bottlenecks, but the planners only aggravated the shortages by consistently over-estimating local resources and under-estimating the requirements for their ambitious production targets. It was not before time that Cyrankiewicz urged a "struggle, better conducted than hitherto, with the growth of bureaucracy in industrial administration, construction, transport - a struggle to make the overgrown administrative apparatus smaller." ³⁶

Although the imitation of the Soviet Union was most disastrous in the economic sphere, this policy also prevailed in other spheres. After 1949, the Party, under Beirut's leadership faithfully followed the directives of the Kremlin. Soviet Marshall Rokossowski took command of the Polish armed forces, the Polish educational system fell under Soviet influence, and Polish book stores, theatres and cinemas were inundated with Soviet products. Resentment of the Soviet Union became intense but, even in the relaxed atmosphere of 1956,

35 Po Prostu, June, 10th, 1956. Quoted by K.Syrop, op.cit.,p.46

36 P.E. Zinner, op.cit., p.103

it could only be expressed very cautiously. By then, however, everybody realized that there could be no democratization if the country were to tolerate external dictation in its internal affairs.

Resentment towards the Soviet Union was closely associated with the campaign against the personality cult. The cult was also the feature of Stalinism singled out for most severe criticism in the press. There was an acute awareness of the evils of the cult and a great deal of soul-searching concerning its growth in Poland. Adam Schaff, an officially approved philosopher wondered how it was possible at all, since it had originated "in a country that was backward both socially and culturally, in a country with a century's old tradition of autocracy, in a country with substantial vestiges of feudatism which were favourable to the personality cult."³⁷ Schaff, expressing a sentiment that had gained many sympathizers especially in the Party itself, attempted to blame the personality cult for the evils of the past. He was challenged by Antoni Slonimski, who said: "The fault, in reality is not due to the cult of the individual, but to the system which permits the individual to conduct such dangerous activities."³⁸ Speaking of the evils of the personality cult in his address to the Eighth Plenum on October, 20th, Gomulka said that it "violated democratic principles and the rule of law. Under that system, the characters and the consciences of men were broken, people were trampled underfoot and their honour was besmirched. Slandering, falsehood, and lies, even provocations, served as instruments in the exercise of authority..... on the soil of the cult of personality, phenomena arose which violated and even nullified the most profound meaning of the people's power."³⁹ Thus the attack on the personality cult became an expression and a symbol of the demand for democratization, for concessions to the people's will.

By the time of the October revolution in Poland, the question was not whether the government was aware of the demands for democratization or, for that matter, whether they would concede to these demands. It was rather, what the new government understood by democratization and how far it would allow the process

37 Nowe Drozi, April, 1956. Quoted by Alexander Korab, in "Poland: the Search for Independence", Problems of Communism, Vol.V, No.6, November, 1956

38 Address to the Nineteenth Session of the Council of Culture and Art. Translation from Zinner, op.cit.

39 Translation from Zinner, op.cit., p.230.

to go. Gomulka and the new leadership enjoyed the confidence of the whole nation mainly perhaps because they had defended Poland's national integrity against the threat of Soviet intervention, but also because they were thought to be sympathetic to democratization. Gomulka was indeed favourable to democratization and he was anxious to justify the people's confidence. But he was also a convinced Marxist for whom democratization did not mean the establishment of a parliamentary or "bourgeois" system, but rather, securing the communist system and making it acceptable to public opinion.

The communists have usually conceived democratization as "the restoration of Leninist norms in political life". But sometimes they have been more explicit. From their own utterances it can be gathered that democratization would involve first, and primarily, an increased participation of the masses in politics; second, a reduction of bureaucracy; third, an enhanced role for elective organs; fourth, more freedom of expression and discussion; and in general, government with the consent and confidence of the people.

The Party outlined its programme for democratization in the resolution adopted by the Eighth Plenum. This unique session is generally considered to mark the beginning of a new era in the development of Polish Communism. As an historical approximation this is certainly true. But for the present purpose it is important to place the Eighth Plenum in perspective, for it was a focus point and a consummation, as well as a beginning. The programme itself was only the culmination of a process of thought and adjustment that had been evolving in the Party at least since the Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U.

The Resolution of the Eighth Plenum was a close reflection of Gomulka's views on democratization which he presented concisely and unambiguously in his address. He made it clear from the outset that democratization could not mean weakening the socialist system. Socialism, he said, was the great hope and ideal of the working class, for which it had fought "from the first days of its conscious life." Yet, as they demonstrated dramatically at Poznan, the workers were profoundly dissatisfied, although Gomulka was sure that they had not demonstrated against the socialist system. "The protested against the evil which was widespread in our social system...against the distortions of the fundamental principles of socialism."⁴⁰

40 Ibid., p.207

To rectify these distortions and make good the shortcomings of the past was the main object of Gomulka's programme. He stressed that it would not be enough to make changes in the composition of the government, "to replace this or that person". Rather, it would be "necessary to change a great deal in our system of People's Government, in the system of the organization of our industry, in the methods of work of the State and Party apparatus."⁴¹ The key to the solution of the problem lay in the hands of the working class, in whose attitude Gomulka confirmed his confidence:

"I have never lost faith in the wisdom, common sense, selflessness, and revolutionary attitude of the working class. In these values of the working class I believe also today."⁴²

It was thus necessary that the Party and the government should have the confidence of the people, for without it none could represent anything more than his own person. Without the people's confidence, it would still be possible to govern the country but it would be bad government, government based on bureaucracy and infringement of the rule of law. In such conditions, said Gomulka, "the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the broadest democracy for the working class and the working masses"⁴³ would be deprived of its meaning. The loss of the confidence of the people would thus be the loss of the moral basis of power.

The only way to maintain the confidence of the people was to tell them the truth at all times (which had not been done in the past) and to increase their participation in the process of government. To this end, the organs of popular democracy, particularly the Sejm and People's councils would have to be reformed so that they could exercise, on behalf of the people, "large scale control over the work of the Government and of the State Organs."⁴⁴ Of primary importance was that the role of the Sejm should be restored to that assigned to it in the constitution. It should exercise the highest legislative and controlling power, and political and legal conditions should be created to enable it to do this. Parliamentary control of the executive "should be exercised by an institution subordinated directly to the Sejm and not to the Government, as has been the case

41 Ibid., p.211

42 Ibid., p.209

43 Ibid., p.210

44 Ibid., p.236

up to now. The Supreme Chamber of State Control, subordinated to the Sejm, should be restored."⁴⁵ Sessions of the Sejm would have to be longer and more frequent and decrees by the Council of State replaced as much as possible by genuine legislation by the Sejm. To ensure that popular representation in the People's State would be democratic, Gomulka announced that a new electoral law would be drafted which would allow the people "to elect and not only to vote."

Turning to the economy, Gomulka spoke of the need to reform the system of industrial management and "to put the whole economic machinery upon new tracks." In this context, he greeted "with great appreciation the initiative of the working class concerning the improvement of industrial management, concerning the participation of the workers in the management of their work establishment. This proves the great and justified faith of the working class in socialism. The leading economic, political and state organs must work intensively in order to help the workers' initiative so that wherever it is possible a generalization of proposed forms should be made."⁴⁶ Gomulka briefly reviewed the record of the Party over the period of the Six Year Plan, especially its failure to improve the living standards of the masses. He pointed out that Poznan had been "a painful lesson to the Party and the Government" that they could not "exceed the measure with impunity." Gomulka proposed an increase in the standard of living as an immediate priority. Such an aim would require increased production at reduced cost and this should be the fundamental thought pervading the idea of workers' self-government. But Gomulka warned that the effort to set the economy on a better foundation could not be confined to the problem of workers' self-government. An even more acute problem was "the liquidation of the so-called administrative over-growths", a problem which there was no way of avoiding.

In the agricultural sector Gomulka recommended that the idea of workers' self-government be fully applied on state farms and that the administrative and economic pressure on the peasants be relaxed. He deplored the policy of discrimination against the kulaks which was not only unnecessary and thoughtless, but which "in reality was not a policy of restricting exploitation but a policy of ruining the kulaks farm."⁴⁷ He supported the growth of voluntary peasant

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., pp.212-213

47 Ibid., p.223

associations and suggested that their emergence could be facilitated by the liquidation of the Rural Machine Stations and the transfer of the machines held by them to the peasants on terms of full repayment. He thought the development of the cooperative movement in agriculture was sound and that it should be encouraged so long as the joining of cooperative farms was voluntary and the members of the cooperatives governed themselves.

"The cooperative is nothing but a self-governing agricultural production enterprise. The board is elected by the free will of the members. The management of the resources of the cooperative should also be according to the will of the members". 48

The success of the cooperative movement could not be achieved by state assistance alone, but by "creative and progressive thinking which is the monopoly of no party and no single man". 49 At this point he invited the other parties and the Catholic groups to join in the implementation of the new policy. "It is a poor idea" he said "to maintain that only communists can build socialism, only people holding materialist social views". 50

Gomulka, however, upheld the leading role of the Communist Party, while proposing certain delimitations of its activity. In the forefront was a clear demarcation of the jurisdiction of the Party and the state apparatus "such as to make everybody responsible for his own work. Otherwise nobody is responsible and the interests of the Party and the state suffer. The principle that the Party and the Party apparatus do not govern but guide, that the task of governing belongs to the state and its apparatus must be expressed in the concrete substance of work and its practice and not only in words." 51 It would also be necessary to extend the control of the Party organs over the Party apparatus, including and beginning with the central apparatus.

Gomulka condemned the widespread and harmful practice of absorbing the most active members into the Party apparatus. This only led to inflation and bureaucratization of the apparatus, while the all important Party cells were deprived of their best members. It also deprived the Party of the opportunity,

48 Ibid., p.222

49 Ibid., p.221

50 Ibid.,

51 Ibid., p.234

which could only be exploited if some of the best members remained in the factories, of shaping the consciousness of the workers. He stressed the importance of close ties between the Party and the masses and of keeping the people continuously informed on public affairs. He chided the Party for its past shortcomings in this respect, especially its loss of touch with the masses and its shirking of responsibility. He also criticized the leadership for not being at the forefront of the democratization process to guide it, and if the Party leadership could not keep pace with the movement then it was understandable that neither could the Party organs.

Gomulka was emphatic about the importance of Party unity, without which the numerous tasks of the Party could not be successfully implemented. He also advocated more openness in Party life and adherence to the principles of democratic centralism. If the Party were going to lead the process of democratization it would have to observe strictly the Leninist principles of Party life in the forefront of which were the election of Party authorities and "the right to maintain one's own views while observing the principle that majority decisions are binding on all Party members."⁵²

Although there was nothing in the programme which would seem radical, or even very liberal in Western eyes, it must be remembered that Gomulka, himself a communist, wanted to maintain the system while making it acceptable to his countrymen. He wanted to build a "Polish road to socialism" via democratization and to win enough independence from the Soviet Union to make this possible. He told the Central Committee that democratization would take time and that they should make haste slowly in such matters. The Party would lead the process of democratization and only the Party, acting with the other Parties of the N.U.F. could guide the process "in a way that will truly lead to the democratization of relations in all the spheres of our life, to the strengthening of the foundations of our system, and not to their weakening".⁵³

He said that more freedom of criticism in all its forms would be permitted, but demanded that this criticism should be "creative and just, that it should help to overcome the difficulties of the present period instead of increasing them".⁵⁴ He warned that democratization did not mean "freedom for the enemies

52 Ibid., p.233

53 Ibid., p.232

54 Ibid., p.238

of freedom", or that anyone could "use the process of democratization to undermine socialism".⁵⁵ At the same time, however, they would not allow themselves to be deflected from their purpose for "the road of democratization is the only road leading to the construction of the best model of socialism in our conditions".⁵⁶

55 Ibid., p.232

56 Ibid.,

CHAPTER III

The Peoples' Government

The structure of government in Poland is in appearance not much different to that in many other continental European countries. Government is directed by a Council of Ministers which is elected and controlled by the Sejm, the Polish chamber of deputies. Local government at provincial and district levels is conducted by elected councils which, together with the central government, control the local departments. The object of the democratization programme, with respect to the system of government, was to rejuvenate these organs by reducing the size and power of the bureaucracy and increasing the participation of the people. Accordingly, Gomulka demanded that the Sejm be restored to its constitutional function and be made "the supreme organ of state power". It may be doubted, however, whether the Sejm could fulfil such a role where the Communist Party is the real holder of power and the effective policy-maker, especially in a country with a rather inauspicious experience of parliamentary government.

The Sejm dates back to the fourteenth century and it was quite a highly developed parliament by the beginning of the seventeenth century. After this it deteriorated, although, during the history of independent Poland, it remained an important element in the system of government. After the First World War, Poland emerged from the partition and embarked on an experiment in modern parliamentary government. The constitution of 1921 concentrated all effective power in the Sejm¹ which was elected on universal suffrage under a system of proportional representation. But economic and international problems, a succession of unstable right-wing coalitions, and a weak tradition of political responsibility made this period of parliamentary government a short one. In 1926, a popularly supported coup d'etat by Pilsudski ushered in a semi-dictatorial regime and by another constitution of 1935, parliamentary government was virtually eradicated.

When the Soviet-sponsored Lublin Committee assumed power in 1944, it declared that the government of Poland would continue on the basis of the 1921 constitution.² The first stage of the communization of the system was the introduction of the

1 The Sejm at this time was the Lower House of a bicameral legislature.

2 Some modifications, however, were effected e.g. the establishment of Peoples' Councils and the Presidium of the Sejm.

Little Constitution in 1947, which made the Sejm a unicameral legislature.³ It was also shorn of most of its powers, although this precaution was unnecessary, a "sharp intensification of the class struggle", having liquidated most of the opposition to the regime. According to the Little Constitution, the Sejm set the general lines of policy and supervised the Cabinet, although the Cabinet itself could issue decrees with the force of law.

In 1952, a new, Soviet-style constitution recognized the Sejm as the highest organ of state and the personification of the will of the working people",⁴ with power of appointment and recall over the government. According to the constitution "the Sejm passes laws and exercises control over the functioning of the other organs of state authority and administration".⁵ No other organ can veto or hold up the passage of the bills of the Sejm which must be signed by the President and secretary of the Council of State. The term of office of the Sejm is set at four years and can neither be prolonged nor shortened, whether by dissolution or by the will of the Sejm itself.⁶

Up to 1956, the Sejm did not fulfil its constitutional functions, although it did perhaps operate within the letter of the constitution. Its sessions were short and infrequent, usually convoked twice a year and having a duration of one to four days.⁷ Between 1952 and 1956, the seven standing committees met only 26 times, the agricultural committee having the best record with six sessions, the Foreign Affairs committee having met only once.⁸ During this period, the Sejm passed 43 laws and approved 155 decrees of the Council of State, contrary to the proportions envisaged by the constitution whereby the issuing of decrees was a definitely subsidiary form of legislation. These failures of the Sejm were widely admitted in Poland in 1956. Cyrankiewicz in his address to the Spring Session in April, said that the Sejm "has not discharged its constitutional functions or has discharged them only in a fragmentary way."⁹ Edmund Osmanczyk, an independent member of the Sejm, said in March that the principles of parliamentary government had not been realized in any of the socialist countries. "Our parliament", he

3 See Stefan Rozmaryn. The Sejm and People's Councils in Poland. P. 13

4 Article 15, par.1 of the Constitution.

5 Article 15, par.3

6 Article 23, par.1 of the Constitution.

7 Polish Press Agency Weekly Review, 29th April, 1960.

8 Hiscocks, op.cit., p.184

9 Translation from Zinner, op.cit., p.95

continued, "does not have a critical attitude toward the proposed laws suggested by the administration. The various committees often meet only the day before the Parliament is convened or even in the intermission between the sessions."¹⁰ The voice of the press was also raised in criticism including that of Trybunu Ladu which, in an editorial of 24th September, wrote: "The shortcoming of our Sejm in the past were one of the many symptoms of the underdevelopment of all democratic organs of authority"¹¹

But the Sejm had already begun to behave more like a genuine legislature. In his April address, Cyrankiewicz observed that "the Sejm is without doubt more fully assuming the role allotted to it in the constitution".¹² He thought that the new spirit of discussions and criticisms which had engulfed the whole nation had also penetrated Polish parliamentarianism. Part of the evidence for this was the increased activity at Sejm committee meetings. The committees had indeed become more active and on August, 24th the legislative committee for the first time refused to endorse a decree by the Council of State. "The proceedings of the plenary session which opened on 5th September, were marked by a vitality quite uncharacteristic of the usual legislature."¹³

By this time, too, the general public demand for a more effective parliament had become more forceful, particularly in the press. In an article entitled "Initiative - Responsibility - Rule of Law", Po Protu pointed out: "The Sejm is not only the organ of control. The Sejm is the Sovereign representation of the people."¹⁴ Julien Hochfeld, a former socialist, writing in Trybunu Ludu on September, 8th said: "It seems that there are no differences in opinion at present on the fact that the efficient execution by the Sejm of its constitutional legislative, and supervisory duties is an urgent problem of democratic State leadership. Only a few people are to be found who do not realize that this is the most important guarantee that the process of democratization will be safeguarded... .."

10 Zycie Warszawy, 25th March, 1956. Quoted in Vol.5., No.6, Problems of Communism, November, 1956, p.12

11 Quoted by C. R. Hiscocks, op.cit., p.205

12 Translation from Zinner, op.cit., p.95

13 Hiscocks, op.cit., p.205

14 Quoted by Hiscocks, op.cit., p.204

"In order that this Sejm should function well, it should - as it seems to me - confer at plenary sessions or in committees not a few times a year for a few days, but throughout the greater part of the year."¹⁵

These expressions, which formed part of the background to Gomułka's address to the Eighth Plenum, were themselves evidence of some democratization in practice and a desire for more.

The first step in the implementation of the democratization programme in general and with respect to the Sejm in particular would be the holding of genuine elections. This would, first of all, give the people confidence in the sincerity of the intentions of the new leadership, while it would give the Sejm the authority of a representative body.

Before 1956, elections had not been genuine. The first post-war elections in 1947 were conducted by the communists in a completely unscrupulous manner as part of their campaign to eliminate opposition. Direct terror was employed against leaders, candidates, messengers, and supporters especially of Mikolajczyk's Peasant Party: some were murdered, many beaten up, and hundreds arrested. Meetings were interrupted by gangs of thugs who started fights thus giving the police an excuse to intervene and arrest previously marked individuals. The counting was usually supervised by communists so that the results were distorted. Even in the rural areas a communist was always "elected", although "the peasants, as long as they had any opportunity to express their feelings, showed their devotion to Mikolajczyk."¹⁶ In the first session of the Sejm after the election, the independent socialist Zulawski said: "It was not a free election, it was not an election at all, but organized violence over the electorate and its conscience... .."¹⁷ The next election in 1952, was not conducted in the same atmosphere of terror but was no less fraudulent. The communists, having liquidated all organized opposition were now firmly in power. The elections were conducted in the familiar communist style, the voters "electing" previously appointed deputies, thus showing their "confidence" in the regime.

After 1956, an attempt was made to introduce some measure of choice into the electoral process. According to Gomułka's promise to the Eighth Plenum,

15 Ibid.

16 Hugh Seton-Watson, From Lenin to Krushchev, p.251

17 Quoted by Hiscocks, op.cit., p.105

a new electoral law was adopted by which the constituents were able to "elect as well as to vote." The elections were still to be on a single list system but the list would contain two-thirds more candidates than there were seats to be filled. The voter exercised his prerogative by deleting the names of those candidates he did not wish to have elected. If he failed to delete any names, it was assumed that he had chosen the candidate at the top of the list. The new law was based on a majority system, an absolute majority being required for election. If less candidates received an absolute majority than there were seats, supplementary elections were held, where only a simple majority was required. There were 459 seats to be filled in the Sejm, according to the proportion set in the constitution of "one Deputy per 60,000 inhabitants."¹⁸

All the parties of the National Unity Front (i.e. the United Workers' Party -/Communist Party/- the United Peasant Party, and the Democratic Party), the Trade Union and the cooperative organizations could nominate candidates for the joint voting list. A number of independent candidates were also allowed to stand for election, including those nominated by the Catholic groups Znak and Pax. Joint nomination committees were set up on the constituencies to select the candidates to be placed on the voting list. The candidates were approved at plenary sessions of the committees which "took their task of selection very seriously".¹⁹ Apparently a great deal of interest was shown in the selection of the candidates and those finally approved were generally well-qualified and public-spirited people. All candidates accepted a joint election programme, the "reason" for this being that there were no longer any antagonisms between social classes. Meetings were arranged between candidates and electors at which there was considerable genuine discussion on the aims of the new programme.

The elections, at which voting was in secret, were conducted by regional electoral committees to which all organizations which had nominated candidates could send a delegate. At the final count the P.U.W.P. held 239 seats, the U.P.P. 118, the D.P. 39, independent candidates 63, giving the P.U.W.P. a 51% majority. Although the electorate was not presented with a genuine choice as this is understood in the West, the elections were more democratic than is usual in communist countries. Their most democratic features seem to have been active

18 Article 16 of the Constitution.

19 Hiscocks, op.cit., p.239

participation in the selection of candidates and the discussions on the election programme. Democracy, however, was kept on a short lead, e.g. in an eve of poll broadcast Gomulka appealed to the nation not to delete the nominations of the P.U.W.P. "Crossing off our Party's candidates", he said, "means crossing out the independence of our country, crossing Poland off the map of European states."²⁰ He obviously feared that anything resembling an electoral defeat of the Communist Party might invite Soviet intervention and endanger the whole democratization programme. Although Gomulka had himself helped to rig the fraudulent elections of 1947, in 1957 he allowed as free an election as could be expected under a communist regime.

Any hopes that the conduct of the 1957 election marked the beginning of a democratic trend in Poland, were not subsequently confirmed. On April 16th, 1961, after Gomulka's regime had been in power for four and a half years, another general election was held. It was conducted on much the same principles as the previous election, but, it marked a reversal rather than a further advance in democratization. A change in the electoral law reduced from two-thirds to one-third, the proportion by which the number of candidates could exceed the number of seats. Many prominent independent or non-communist candidates were excluded and the quota of the Catholic groups was reduced.

As previously, candidates were proposed by the political parties, social organizations and non-political groups, but there was less discussion and more official supervision of the nominations. The candidates of the U.W.P. were chosen at Party meetings while those proposed by other organizations were carefully screened.

As previously, all candidates accepted the N.U.F. programme which was in effect the programme of P.U.W.P. although it had been drafted by a fifteen-man committee of the three parties. The programme was based on the new economic plan which was approved by the Sejm in February. Since the 1957 elections the standard of living improved a little and the regime seems to have thought that this would win for it the support of the electorate. On February 1st, Roman Zambrowski wrote in Zycie Partii, "At present, the possibilities of finding full understanding and support for our policy and our activities among the working people are greater than ever before."²¹ He also spoke of the favourable results

20 Quoted by Hiscocks, op.cit., p.240

21 Translation from the Polish Press Agency Weekly Review, 2nd February, 1961.

of the previous plan and of the important contribution which the Polish delegation under Gomulka had made to the conference of eighty-one parties in Moscow in November, 1960. The programme also promised further economic improvements including an increase of "nearly one-third" in the wages of the lower paid workers. "In all our activities we strive for the development of our country, of its industry and agriculture, of science, education, and culture, to assure work and wages, housing, health care, rest, and a quiet old age to all people and the constant improvement of conditions of life and work."²² The government also took the opportunity at pre-election meetings, "to show that which has been done, to indicate the future tasks and also to explain why certain things have not been done."²³

The poll at the elections was slightly higher than 1957²⁴ but the attendance at pre-election meetings was rather less, except for the meetings to discuss the nomination of candidates for the district peoples' councils. Pre-election meetings, however, were still the most interesting feature. At the request of the electors, more than 9,000 proposed candidates for the Sejm and peoples' councils were dropped. At meetings between candidates and voters, problems arising from the election programme were discussed and the demands of the people were heard. These demands were registered and referred to the consideration of committees which were set up after the elections. Unrealistic requests were met by sincere explanations, pointing to the limited possibilities or to more urgent needs.²⁵ The election meetings at least gave the electorate an opportunity to discuss the issues of the day with representatives of the government and may have given it some insight into the problems facing the regime.

But as a sequel to the political ferment of 1956 and the relatively free discussion before the 1957 elections, the 1961 election was disappointing. The pre-election meetings took much the same form as in 1957 but they were less significant, not only because of the rather special circumstances of the 1957

22 The programme of the National Unity Front. Translation from Polish Facts and Figures, 18th March, 1961.

23 Cyrankiewicz in a speech in Cracow, April, 7th, 1961. Translation from Polish Facts and Figures, 15th April, 1961.

24 The poll in 1961 was 94.83% compared to 94.14% in 1957.

25 According to Trade Union News, May, 1961.

election, but also because certain manoeuvres of the regime went far to ensuring the result before the election took place. The much vaunted discussions themselves became to a large extent a mere part of the art of government; a refinement of the technique, well proven in the Soviet Union, of allowing the people to speak openly from time to time and vent their views, without actually allowing them to exercise any decisive influence on the determination of policy.

The first Sejm to meet after the October revolution assembled on 20th February, 1957. The session was convened by the Council of State, which, according to the constitution must call a session not more than one month after a general election. The first task of the new Sejm, after the swearing in of deputies, was to elect the Marshal of the Sejm whose responsibilities are similar to those of the speaker of the House of Commons. The Marshall is assisted in his duties by two deputy marshals, together with the Marshall from the Presidium of the Sejm. The Presidium regulates the detailed procedure of the Sejm, ensuring punctuality and propriety, maintain order, guards prerogatives, and interprets and applies the rules (Standing Orders), referring to doubtful cases to the Mandates and Rules Committee. The Presidium is further assisted by ten Secretaries, chosen from among the deputies, whose duties comprise the listing of speakers, the taking of minutes, and the counting of votes. In the arrangement of dates and timetables of sessions, the Presidium consults with the chairman of the deputies club, who together with the Presidium, form the Seniors Committee.

The most significant organs of the Sejm are the committees. The Rules of the Sejm distinguish between the Standing and Select committees. The Standing Committees, of which there were nineteen in the Second Sejm (i.e. 1957-1961) each deal with one or more branches of the administration. The Select Committees are nominated by the Sejm for specific purposes, for example the Select Committee on the Workers' Self Government Bill, and dissolve when their tasks are completed. The committees generally have about twenty-five members although some have over thirty while the smallest, the defence committee, has only eleven. All parties, including the "independent" members are represented proportionately on Committees. A deputy does not usually sit on more than two.

Theoretically, at least, the Sejm exercises sovereignty over the other organs of government. It appoints the Council of State which, as a collective Head of State, performs similar functions to a President. The Council is chosen

from among the deputies and fulfils the duties of the Sejm between sessions. The Council of Ministers (Cabinet) is also appointed by the Sejm. It elects a Prime Minister, who chooses his own council, which must then be approved by the State. A minister need not be a deputy, although he must not be a member of the Council of State. The Cabinet is also "accountable" to the Sejm and may be dismissed by it. This provision, however, is of little significance because the permanent stability of the Party system²⁶ ensures that there can never be a vote of censure on the government and rarely a sceptical or critical review of its activities. Ministers are obliged to give periodical reports on their policy and the work of their departments and fruitful discussion sometimes ensues. Criticism, however, usually seems to be directed at shortcomings which the Minister himself has pointed out. Dismissals of individual ministers have in fact occurred but generally at the "request" of the Prime Minister.

Legislative procedure in the Sejm does not differ conspicuously from that in other legislatures. Initiative belongs to the Council of State, the Council of Ministers, and the deputies. Most legislation is introduced by the government as is the case in most parliaments. The initiative of Private Members is not great but sometimes they introduce bills that are considerably significant for example, the Bills on Workers' Self-Government and co-operatives. Bills are read twice, amendments being proposed in writing at the second reading. Debate may be curtailed by formal motion, adjournment, or closure, but their use is uncommon, prolonged debate being itself a rarity. Voting takes place first on the amendments and then on the Bill as a whole. A vote is generally by a show of hands but, on the movement of thirty members, it may be taken by a roll call. Decisions are by a simple majority and in special cases, such as constitutional amendments, by a two-thirds majority. These stipulations, however, seem superfluous since voting is frequently unanimous and never 'close'.

Sittings of the Sejm are normally in public but sessions may be held in Camera at the suggestion of the Presidium or thirty members. Debates are reported on radio and brief summaries of the proceedings at plenary sessions are published by the Marshal's office, with regard to which the Marshal reserves the right to delete "anything derogatory to the Sejm or inconsistent with the deputies oath and the duty of loyalty to the Polish Peoples' Republic". Special announcements

26 See below for a discussion of the Party structure.

are made on the debates at committee meetings which are always secret. Since 1956 it has become customary to submit Bills to public discussion in the press, on the radio, at deputies' meetings with their constituents, and in discussions with those interested in the given problem. This procedure was adopted for example with the bills on Peoples' Councils, Workers' Self-Government, and alcoholism. Legislation is exclusively by the Sejm, the decrees of the Council of State being subject since 1956 to the approval of the Sejm. The Sejm approves or rejects decrees by a simple resolution after a report by the appropriate committee. If however, it considers it necessary to reject any part of a decree or make any amendments therein, it does so by new legislation introduced by the committee.²⁷ During the second term of the Sejm (1957-'61) the Council of State issued two decrees. The government itself cannot issue decrees but it may issue executive orders. It does so on authority granted by the Sejm for implementing a specified statute. The orders may be examined by the courts for compatibility with the statute and if found ultra vires, the courts may refuse to implement them. The courts, however, cannot pass an opinion on the constitutionality of decrees and no other means exist for controlling executive orders.

The legislative competence of the Sejm extends over every aspect of political and social life in Poland including the annual budget and the economic plans. This latter is the most significant part of Sejm legislation for it includes the income and expenditures of the nationalized industries and agriculture. The important thing of course is the activity displayed by the Sejm in legislation and this activity appears to have increased considerably since 1956. During the first term of the Sejm (i.e. from 1952-1956) only a little time - about two days - was allocated to discussion of the budget. Since then, however, the discussion of the budget has formed the bulk of the Sejm's business, consuming nearly three months of legislative time every year. The budget itself, which used to consist simply of a brief statement and a few tables, has been presented as a full length bill over a hundred pages long, supplemented by explanatory information. Much of the work on the budget is done in committees, especially the Committee on Economic Planning, Budget and Finance, one of the largest Sejm committees. Some sections, for example, the expenditure on education,

27 This is the only occasion that a committee may introduce legislation.

agriculture, or communications, are referred to the consideration of the relevant committees. The itemized sections on the individual departments are discussed with the ministers concerned and changes may be suggested. This increased role for the Sejm at least indicates a respect for the principle of open discussion of public finances which was conspicuously absent before 1956. According to Zenon Kliszko, "the Polish Sejm has concrete possibilities on the occasion of the debate on the budget and plan, of going into the details of all spheres of economic and social life."²⁸

In the ordinary legislation of the Sejm, as with most legislatures, the bulk of the business is done in committees. Unfortunately, not much is known of the proceedings at Sejm committees but it may be gathered that the debate is genuine and that some fruitful work is achieved.²⁹ Discussion is generally on a non-party basis and the members strive for a general convergence of views.

"In an atmosphere of free exchange of opinions and views, sometimes sharp discussions and controversy, a common idea was born - a supplement, an improvement on the draft law."³⁰

A bill which affects more than one sphere of government may be referred to two or three committees which then confer through a joint sub-committee. Members of the government and representatives of interested parties for example, the Trade Unions or Co-operatives, may be invited to some sessions of the committees.

In committees, the bills are first subjected to detailed discussion, article by article. Proposed amendments are then considered and those not accepted are presented to the plenary session of the Sejm as minority proposals. Amendments are discussed with the ministers before being presented to the plenary session, although this would seem to restrict the scope for debate in the Sejm itself. Sometimes the committee, while approving the principle of a

28 Nowa Kultura, 26th February, 1961. Translation, Weekly Review 28th February, 1961.

29 Many sources suggest this, but see Hiscocks, op.cit., 275

30 Ludwik Pol, Nowe Drogi, April, 1960. Translation from Polish Press Agency, Materials and Documents, 1960, No.9



bill may suggest that it be revised completely.³¹ This was done in the case of the bill on State Trade inspection which was passed on February, 25th, 1958. The Bill had been introduced in October, 1957, and returned by the Internal Trade Committee. During its work on the new Bill, which was submitted in December, the committee broadened the scope of the Bill, precisely defined the tasks of State Trade inspection, and the powers of the central and local governments with regard to the inspectors, and introduced a provision for closer liaison between the inspectorate and the co-operative movements. Sometimes the committees suggest completely new legislation to the government. The Labour and Social Welfare Committee, for example, in November, 1957, suggested measures to combat alcoholism and the social evils resulting from it. The matter received the consideration of the government which in November, 1959, submitted to the committee a report embodying its recommendations. Following some discussion with the Council of Ministers a bill to the same effect was introduced in the Sejm in December.

The most significant function of the Sejm is the control of the administration, and here the most important role is undoubtedly that of the committees which do not appear to be restricted in their activity. "The Standing Committees of the Sejm have become the principle apparatus of systematic, day-to-day, parliamentary control over the work of the organs of the State administration and the socialist economy. This should not be surprising since these committees have a permanent membership becoming more and more expert in their sphere."³² The main work of the committees does not consist so much of holding the government responsible as of co-operating with the government in preparing bills, collecting information, and sounding opinions. Nevertheless, the committees seem to exercise a degree of supervision over the governments departments quite uncommon in a communist regime.

The committees began to take an interest in the affairs of the departments in 1956, analyzing their plans and accounts and examining their activities

31 Compare: "There have been instances when committees rejected projected laws or the government withdraw the draft project of a law after a committee had expressed a negative opinion. The committees introduce numerous significant amendments." Konstanty Lubienski, member of Znak, in Tygodnik Powszechny, English summary, June, 2nd, 1963.

32 J. Hyrniewiecki and A. Starewicz, The Polish Diet, p.119

throughout the country. They have continued this supervision sometimes recommending changes in administrative methods and suggesting ways of improving public relations. They also examine reports made to the Sejm by ministers of State enterprises and give opinions on matters arising from them. The committees may also carry out investigations themselves, including on-the-spot enquiries into the operations of individual plants, enterprises, and institutions and may hear expert or professional opinions on specific problems. Having completed their enquiries, the committees can give effect to their conclusions in requests or postulates addressed to the government or resolutions submitted to the Sejm. A request contains an assessment of the situation in a sector of the administration or the economy revealed by investigation together with the committees conclusions which are in the form of measures recommended. Requests are fairly commonly made directly to the minister concerned, who is not obliged to comply. In their enquiries the committees concentrate on key problems. Lesser matters may be settled in normal consultations between the departments and the committees. These consultations are frequent and usually marked by frankness on both sides.

In the business of control of the administration, the committees are assisted and sometimes co-operate with the Supreme Chamber of Control. The Supreme Chamber of Control was revived as an organ of the Sejm, theoretically independent of the government, by an amendment of the constitution in December, 1957. It supervises the work of the government departments and the nationalized industries particularly the legality and efficiency of their operations. "Its staff includes men of experience, expert knowledge, and integrity, who have clearly not been chosen for their acceptability to the Party!"³³ Although there is no regular Question Time or Debate on the Adjournment, deputies may ask questions in the form of interpellations, submitted in writing to the Marshal and addressed to any of the ministers or to the Prosecutor-General. The reply may be made verbally or in writing through the Marshal. If a deputy finds the reply unsatisfactory he may have his interpellation placed on the agenda of a plenary Session at which the interpellee is required to give further explanation. Discussion may follow and the Sejm can ask for supplementary information. Provision has been made for plenary sessions to be called to hear interpellations if they have accumulated. Between 1957-1961, there were 140 interpellations, compared with

33 Hiscocks, op.cit., p.275

53 in the first term.

In addition to their work in the Sejm and in its committees, the deputies are expected to report back to their constituents on the work of the Sejm and the policy of the government. "The work of a deputy has two aspects: that of a parliamentarian in the Sejm, and that of a deputy-Activist in his constituency with his electors".³⁴

Deputies hold regular meetings with constituents, answer their questions and make notes of local grievances. The deputy thus becomes a link between the government and the people, and as such is very useful to both. His visits to the constituencies and his reports provide the government with a means of following the movement of public opinion and gives the people an opportunity to discuss government policy in their locality. The work of deputies in this sphere is facilitated by a new experiment with informal Voivodship Deputies Groups in the Sejm. The success of the deputy's work depends to a large extent on the activity of his voivodship group in which he confers with other deputies and exchange experiences.

Attempts have been made to regularize and broaden the contacts between deputies and constituents; Kielce voivodship introduced a system of three regular annual meetings between the deputies and political and economic leaders in the province. At these meetings both sides had the opportunity to exchange much useful knowledge and information pertaining to local issues. Kielce also began regular meetings between deputies and "village activities", which apparently were much appreciated by local councils, party organizations, and peasant organizations. There were 4 such meetings in 1957, 16 in 1958, and 18 in 1959. These two innovations have also been adopted in several other voivodships.

In the Sejm, there is no division along Party lines between the government and the opposition as is generally the case in Western European parliaments. All deputies, however, belong to one of the so-called Party clubs, which were reinstated in the Sejm in 1957. In addition to the three political parties' clubs, there are clubs for the Catholic group - Zna - and for independent non-party members. According to some accounts, these 'divisions' help to enliven the work

34 Ludwik Pol, Nowe Drogi, April, 1960. The Parliamentary System in Peoples' Poland. Translation Materials and Documents, 1960, No. 9

of the Sejm leading to "even a clash of views on some questions". But a more accurate account of the situation is probably that "the Deputies' Clubs can find a common language and succeed in overcoming all particularisms and differences, being guided by the common programme of the National Unity Front, which is based on the directives of the Polish United Workers' Party Central Committee."³⁵ In fact the party divisions are not very significant in the work of the Sejm, since the parties form a permanent coalition even presenting a joint manifesto at elections. There can be no opposition because Polish political parties are not competitive like their counterparts in the West. Indeed they are not political parties in the accepted sense. Rather they are mass organizations through which the people may gain a sense of participation in political life under the surveillance of the regime. The only reason why there are other parties at all than the Polish United Workers' Party is that Poland is not yet considered a fully socialist state, but a people's democracy in which there are still remnants of the class struggle.³⁶ Each of the parties mobilizes and represents one of the classes or strata of society. The Polish United Workers' Party primarily represents the working class although it is active in all other spheres also. The United Peasant Party caters mainly to the rural population, chiefly the peasants who form 78% of its membership. The Democratic Party represents the "bourgeois" elements, the artisans and small traders, the intelligentsia, and the professional classes.

All parties work together in the National Unity Front for "the construction of socialism", in which the United Peasant Party and the Democratic Party recognize the leading role of the Polish United Workers' Party. Of the latter two parties, Gomulka himself says:

"These are not Marxist parties but independent parties of Socialist democracy which rally their members and supporters around the construction of Socialism and the fulfilment of the current tasks of common policy."

Gomulka also emphasizes:

"Acknowledgement of the leading role of our Party in the National Front does not mean issuing commands to the allied parties on their transformation into a transmission belt of the Party. On

35 Ludwik Pol, op.cit.

36 A discussion of this theory is given by Bzrezinski, The Soviet Bloc, p.

the contrary, it assumes the independent initiative of every party, common responsibility for the fulfilment of a common programme and co-operation in the governing of Peoples' Poland."³⁷

But one may gather that the independence of the "allied parties" is not very significant, if only from the unusual vigour and frequency with which it is expressed. They do, however, have an opportunity to voice the views of the interests which they represent. Perhaps their main value in Polish society is that their at least nominal independence from the Polish United Workers' Party, "enables many people who would have much less opportunity for political and social activity if there were only a single party in Poland, to engage in such work."³⁸

The only truly independent and certainly the most interesting group in the Sejm is the group of Catholic intellectuals who came to be known as "Znak". In the second term of the Sejm, Znak had nine members but after the 1961 election, its number dropped to five. These were S. Stomma, S. Kisielewski, T. Mazowiecki, J. Zowieyski, and K. Lubienski. The Znak deputies say of themselves:

"We have entered the Sejm as non-party political workers with a Christian world outlook. At the same time, we are linked up with social circles of different walks of life. They are: the groups centred round Tygodnik Powszechny, the monthly Znak, the monthly Wież, and the Catholic intellectuals' clubs."³⁹

They entered politics, "being convinced that our attitude, as well as the problems and postulates of the social circles whose opinions we are trying to express to the best of our abilities, should be represented in political life, in the arena of the Sejm."⁴⁰ Znak does not claim to represent all the Catholics in Poland, "one of the reasons being its small membership. Moreover, in matters relating to social and political life, the opinions of believers are not uniform..."⁴¹ It does not consider itself even the nucleus of a Catholic political party mainly

37. Address to the Third Congress of Polish United Workers' Party, Polish Press Agency, Materials and Documents, 1959 - Nos.4-5

38 Witold Lipski, "A Partner in Government", Polish Perspectives, April, 1959

39 From an article in Tygodnik Powszechny on May 17th, 1961 signed by all the Znak deputies. Translation, Materials and Documents, 1961, No. 11

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

"because there are no conditions in Poland at present for the establishment of such a party."⁴² Nor does it claim to act with the backing or the authority of the Church but entirely on its own responsibility, although it seeks the understanding of the Church for the position it takes.

The members of Znak have often found themselves in direct disagreement with the Party, especially on social and moral issues. But the experience of 1956 showed that "believers and unbelievers can always meet on the platform of humanistic realism and of genuine, objective patriotism."⁴³ But the members of Znak are careful to point out that they do not participate in politics as co-governors. They only wish to achieve certain defined aims such as a measure of democratic control of the administration, freedom of cultural and scientific thought, and "freedom in choosing a world outlook". The latter they consider of particular importance, not only because they are continuously demanding such freedom themselves, "but also because such freedom is always indivisible, and in the more profound sense of the word, concerns all". Znak has itself been quite active in the Sejm, voicing criticisms of the government and making nineteen interpellations during the second term, but they recognize their limitations: "we must realistically evaluate the possibilities of our Club, bear in mind the role of the Sejm in Poland, and the structure of forces in it."⁴⁴

Despite the much vaunted independence of the various political groups in the Sejm, the Polish United Workers' Party remains "the leading force of the nation". Just as this limits the scope of other parties, there is also a danger that it might weaken or even negate the sovereignty of the Sejm. Since the Party hierarchy is the real seat of power in Poland, and since it is given on the authority of the Party itself that its directives are the main source of legislation, it is at least an anomaly to maintain that legislation is exclusively by the Sejm. That the Party itself is very sensitive on this issue may be gathered from its attempts to rationalize its role vis-a-vis the Sejm.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

A typical form of this rationalization might be constructed along the following lines. In every country, both socialist and bourgeois, the main political decisions are shaped outside Parliament and it is the political parties that play the most important part in shaping them. This is as might be expected, because parties contain the most politically conscious members of a class and play the leading role in moulding the opinions of their class. This is not antithetical to democracy but rather one of its guarantees since parties are a means of "ensuring the realization of the interests of the ruling class". In a socialist system the organizations through which the masses participate in government is the workers' party which, being the party of the ruling class, must take measures to see that its directives assume the form of laws passed by parliament. "No class, if it wants to preserve its social and political power, can afford to renounce its party as an instrument of political leadership in the community."⁴⁵

Now, while it may be granted that political parties everywhere try to implement their own programme, if they gain power and even that the party in power is often the effective legislator, it must be pointed out that, in the most of the so-called bourgeois countries at least no party is in a position to issue "directives" to the whole nation or even to rely on its policies always being implemented. Again, while parties may act as guarantees of democracy, they can only do so if, representing competitive approaches to politics, they submit their philosophies and plans of action to the arbitration of electorate. If, however, a party wields power and imposes its own will on the population because it is the self-appointed "Party of the ruling class", it is then not a guarantee of democracy but of oligarchical tyranny. Finally, if one accepts the thesis that parties are the instruments of the class struggle, their very existence is inconsistent with democracy, which is the result, not of an attitude of conflict, but of co-operation and the desire to compromise in pursuit of a common end. Yet if the validity of these premises cannot be upheld, the whole absurd argument collapses and one is led to the conclusion that the Polish United Workers' Party is indeed the only power in the land and that the Sejm is but an elaborate means of ratifying its "directives".

It is not always necessary, however, to resort to the methods of argument to elucidate this point. For the communists themselves are sometimes quite frank. Thus we are told that "revisionist theories aiming at reducing the relationship of

45 Weekly Review, 29th April, 1960.

the Party and parliament to 'check the balance' and confining the Party to propaganda and education work is directed against the leadership of the Party in the system of the dictatorship of the proletariat."⁴⁶ The demand that the Sejm should have the monopoly of legislation "was an expression of a misunderstanding or a reluctance to understand the role of the Party in the mechanism of the dictatorship of the proletariat.--- It is the centre of political inspiration which establishes the general line of action to be taken by the organs of state power."⁴⁷ Zenon Kliszko, a close friend of Gomulka, maintains that, in a socialist democracy, the leading role of the Party and the supreme position of the Sejm are not "not opposed but complementary." Then, in a candid statement which is probably more revealing than he realized, he says: "The programme postulates put forward by the Party become the directives for the policy conducted by the socialist state and the legal basis of the activity of state organs... It is in the Sejm that the realization of the Party directives takes place."⁴⁸

Although the Party is the main power in Poland the authority of the Sejm has undoubtedly expanded both in theory and in practice. In the principle domains of its work it showed considerable activity during the second term.⁴⁹ It at least provides a forum for the public venting of new legislation and reports on the work of government departments. In accordance with promises made in 1956, the Sejm has been provided with much fuller information especially on the government's economic policy. The deputies themselves have become a means through which the government and people can communicate and gauge each other's intentions and reactions. The control of the government by the committees, even if it is not comprehensive, is a contribution to good government and perhaps even to democratic government. It may also be hazarded that in the legislative process itself, the debates in the Sejm, even if they are neither comprehensive nor very

46 Ibid.

47 Ludwik Pol, op.cit.

48 "The Sejm of Socialist Democracy", in Nowa Kultura, 26th February, 1961. Translation from Weekly Review, 28th February, 1961.

49 During the second term, from February, 20th, 1957 to February 17th, 1961, the Sejm held 59 plenary sessions, passed 174 bills, adopted 24 decisions and 11 resolutions, heard over 1,100 speeches by members and over 40 statements by ministers. The committees held over 1,200 meetings, made 2,500 suggestions to the government and sent 35 resolutions to the Sejm. According to Czeslaw Wycech, the Marshal of the Sejm in Weekly Review, 24th February, 1961.

critical, facilitate the clarification and wider understanding of the purpose of new legislation.

Despite this development of the Sejm's functions, even members of the Party suggest that there is scope and opportunity for further progress. This is particularly so in the debate on new legislation. Konstanty Lubienski, one of the Znak deputies, says that the deputies could do much to be better prepared for these general debates.⁵⁰ Most important in this respect is the contribution of those who, because of their profession or specialized knowledge, are best qualified to express opinions and introduce amendments to proposed legislation. "Obviously this necessitates much enquiring into the particular questions and the consulting of experts chosen by the deputies." Lubienski also feels that the time given to debating new legislation is still too short. The committees especially do not always have the time "to allow unhurried and detailed discussions".

Whatever the results of democratization with respect to the Sejm, it has not fully realized the terms of Gomulka's programme. Although its sovereignty is recognized in theory, it has not become the supreme organ of state power. But, given the nature of the communist system, and the pronouncements of the Party regarding its own role, a considerable advance has been made. Even so, the results have disappointed many individuals and groups who hoped that more would be achieved, that the Sejm might become an organ of parliamentary democracy. As might have been expected the regime had no sympathy with this aspiration. Perhaps the final word was given by Adam Schaff, who criticized certain "revisionists" who hoped for too much from the reform of the Sejm. "Our Party is a Marxist-Leninist Party, we are firm enemies of social democracy, and for this very reason, and on behalf of the ideological unity of the Party, we are not going to tolerate the heralds of social democracy in our midst".⁵¹

50 In an article in Tygodnik Powszechny, English summary, June, 2nd, 1963.

51 Zycej Partii, November, 1957, Quoted by Hiscocks, op. cit. p.266.

CHAPTER IV

Self-Government in Industry

Of the many currents in the vast social upheaval of 1956, the most novel and the most interesting was, perhaps, the demand of the workers for a liberalization of the industrial regime and a measure of autonomy for their own organizations. To the Polish industrial workers, democratization, to a large degree, meant the relaxation of the draconic labour discipline and the introduction of a system of management which would take their views and interests into account. The Party itself, under its new leadership, stated its appreciation of the workers' demand for an improved system of management and welcomed their initiative in the establishment of workers' councils. It further promised to help the workers in their efforts to secure a share in the management of industry. According to the resolution of the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee, one of the primary tasks of the Party in the democratization process was "to increase the direct participation of workers in the management of Socialist enterprises and in the government of the country."¹

The idea that workers should participate in the management of industry and even share in the financial proceeds of enterprise is not itself a new one. Its origins may be traced back to the syndicalist movement and perhaps further. Yet, though the idea itself is not new, the suggestion that it should be implemented is still revolutionary. There is, of course, no prescribed model on which the structure of industrial government should be democratized, but the basic purpose is, especially in large organizations, to develop the proprietary instinct of the workers, give them a say, however small, in management, and a stake in the industry's future. A number of plans incorporating these principles have been made in the West, including the co-ownership plan of the British Liberal Party. While most of these plans remain securely on paper, one interesting example in practice is the experiment in co-determination in West German industry, which "by making industry more democratic has strengthened the foundations of political democracy".²

Co-determination was introduced in the coal, iron and steel industries in West Germany in May, 1951. A vote taken in the miners and metal workers unions during the previous winter had shown that the overwhelming majority of the members

1 Zinner, op.cit., p.241

2 C.R.Hiscocks, Democracy in Western Germany, 218

were in favour of the scheme. Under the law of 1951, the board of directors was to consist of five of the owners or managers, five of the employees, and one other member agreed by both parties. The five workers' representatives had to include one manual worker, one of the clerical staff, and two trade union officials. In addition to the board of directors each firm was to have a management committee, consisting of a production manager, a business manager, and a labour manager. The labour manager, who would be responsible for working conditions and social problems could not be appointed or dismissed without the approval of a majority of the workers' representatives. This system of management was instituted in the hope that, by achieving some measure of economic democracy, it would increase the interest and efficiency of the employees and contribute to peaceful industrial relations. The results of German industry in recent years suggest that, despite some difficult problems, co-determination has achieved at least some success.

Some experiments in workers' participation in industrial management have also been made in communist countries, notably Yugoslavia. This should not be surprising since some of the early communists promised that industry would in fact belong to the workers after the revolution. During the Russian revolution the workers actually seized control in many factories, perhaps in the expectation that the socialist millenium was just around the corner. Any idea, however, that the workers would have any autonomous role in industry was quickly shattered by Lenin himself. He told a workers' congress in 1918 that:

"It is necessary that everything be subordinated to Soviet authority and that all illusions about any 'independence' either for particular strata or for workers' co-operatives be forgotten as soon as possible. This hope for an independent role can exist only where a hope of some kind of return to the past survives." ³

Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks could not so hastily alienate the workers who had supported them and were vital to their remaining in power. Trade unions, purged of effective leadership and brought under Party control, were assigned to the role of mobilizing the workers for the purposes of the socialist state. The pretence of trade unions and the "workers' state" have, of course, been maintained and, in recent years, there have been attempts to make the pretence

3 Quoted by W. Kulski, Peaceful Coexistence, p.61

appear more of a reality by the establishment of shop committees in Soviet factories. There is no reason to believe, however, that these committees have any genuine participation in management.

This type of industrial government, with all effective power concentrated at the centre, was exported, almost unchanged to the countries of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. In Poland there was some delay in the complete Sovietization of industry, but from the beginning the statutes of the nationalized industries made provision for the participation of workers in management. A decree of February 6th, 1945, established Works Councils to represent the workers in the state enterprises and provided that some of the councillors would sit on the board of management. Although this law remained in force, it was deprived of all practical significance when the Works' Councils were sub-ordinated to the Trade Unions, which were themselves brought under the control of the government. At the same time, the autonomy of management, which had been proposed in a decree of January 3rd, 1947, was cancelled by the abolition of the managerial boards and their replacement by factory directors holding supreme powers. The outcome of this change of policy was the integration of management and unions with the agencies of the central economic administration, and the emergence of a Soviet-type industrial structure in which management had little initiative and the trade unions had no power or policy of their own.

Within this system of industrial relations, the interests of the workers were not protected. Low wages, poor hygiene, crippling work norms, and flagrant abuses of power by the management became the outstanding features of working conditions in Poland after 1949. Although the Works' Councils continued to be elected by the workers, they had no means of making effective representation to the management which tried to crush them into obedience. Being at the very foot of the trade union hierarchy they had no influence at its higher levels which were becoming increasingly bureaucratized, detached from the workers, and indifferent to their situation. Trade unions in fact often betrayed the interests of the workers, conniving with the management to ignore labour legislation and collective agreements. Indeed they became a means of enforcing the oppressive work demands of ambitious factory managers, instead of defending the workers against such demands.

Towards the end of 1954 and throughout 1955, the harshness of the industrial

regime and the oppressive conduct of factory managers were subjected to severe and open criticism by the workers and employees. There was no substantial improvement in working conditions however, and the abuses continued into the first months of 1956. By this time the workers were more articulate and highly impatient. There was a marked increase in the volume of criticism especially amongst trade union activists and workers' representatives. The usefulness of the trade unions was questioned and their failures widely discussed.

"Generally speaking trade unions are neither representatives and defenders of the workers' interests nor co-managers of the working establishments. They have become a clique supporting the bureaucratic economic management. In the name of the interests of the economic plan, which had higher priority than human needs, they condoned brutal violations of labour laws, in particular as regards protection of labour. Although representing millions of associated workers they had no idea regarding the organization of social and economic life, which could be considered by the members of the trade unions as their own." ⁴

The general attitude amongst the workers appears to have been that both the management and the unions would have to be given more autonomy and their sphere of jurisdiction clearly delimited before the unhealthy condition of industrial relations could be cured.

Following this discussion there was some relaxation of labour discipline, but this only produced demands for more fundamental reforms which were denied. The seething unrest finally boiled over in the Poznan revolt and several smaller riots and disturbances throughout the country. Meeting in the wake of these events, the Seventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party paid special attention to industrial relations. It proposed to increase the powers of factory managers while urging the Party to "Combat methods of bureaucratic management in work establishments."⁵ It also proposed to enlarge the role of the works' councils in running the enterprises, particularly with respect to "matters connected with the material situation of personnel and working conditions".⁶ The Committee further suggested that the works' councils should participate in drafting factory plans, in the allocation of the works' fund, and should be enabled "to control and see to it that the collective work contracts and the collective agreements are implemented."⁷

4 Quoted by Kazimierz Grybowski, "Polish Workers' Councils", Journal of Central European Affairs, Vol.17, No.3, October, 1957, p.279

5 Resolution of the Seventh Plenum, Zinner, op.cit., p.168

6 Zinner, op.cit., p.169

7 Ibid.

But the proposals of the Central Committee came too late for the workers had already taken matters into their own hands. During the widespread labour unrest that accompanied the Poznan riots, the workers at a number of factories had spontaneously elected their own workers' councils to agitate on their behalf. These councils were the final crystallization of a prolonged discussion amongst trade union activists and representatives, on the subject of labour-management relations. It had become utterly clear that the mere admission of errors and the punishment of the guilty was not itself enough to eradicate the malpractices of the industrial regime. The basic question facing the workers was how their interests could be effectively protected so that the managerial abuses would not recur. It was felt that the workers' councils, by giving the workers a share in policy making and some measure of control over the management, would achieve this object. The movement in favour of workers' councils began quite early in the summer and by the time of the Poznan events, plans were already underway to establish a system of workers' self-government at the Zeran motor workers in Warsaw.

The newly formed workers' councils generally met with the favour of the regime. It could hardly have opposed the councils since it had repeatedly made promises of democratization which had been endorsed by the personalities currently in power. Cyrankiewicz had committed himself to decentralization in industry in April, and Ochab had advocated an extension of workers' democracy in his address to the Seventh Plenum. But even apart from these pledges, the response of the regime could not have been other than it was since, in the summer of 1956, the Polish ruling hierarchy was in a state of confusion. The government and the administration had lost all initiative and were in no position to re-impose a strong discipline on the labour force. The Party was long out of touch with the mood of the workers and, despite the unanimous resolution of the Seventh Plenum, were deeply divided. Although even the 'liberal' faction was not wholeheartedly in favour of democratization, the Party was forced, by the pace of events and its own weakness, to follow the masses or be swept into the rapids of revolution. At the lower levels, the situation was if any thing worse. The basic Party organs, without positive leadership from above, had become demoralized. At the time of the Poznan crisis many apparatchiki had simply fled rather than explain the Party line to angry workers. The trade unions had revolted against government control and were now demanding reforms from their own leaders and from the government. Thus, since there were no reliable means by

which the regime could enforce an unpopular policy, the workers' councils met little opposition and spread quickly.

The new regime was almost bound to give its support to the workers' councils. Not only had Gomulka himself promised an extensive democratization of Polish society, it was also clear that the workers themselves were overwhelmingly in favour of the workers' councils. Furthermore, Gomulka's "party" had come to power largely with the support of the workers, and to disappoint them from the beginning would have been a serious political error. On the other hand, to encourage the workers' councils would be a concrete gesture of the sincerity of his promises. Anyway, the workers' councils could only serve the interests of the new government. By giving the workers a renewed interest in the affairs of their enterprise, the councils would help to raise productivity. By satisfying to a large extent the demands of the workers they would contribute to restoring moral. By giving the workers some say in management they could also bring back to industrial life a spirit of goodwill and co-operation which was perhaps the most urgent need in 1956.

Little time was in fact wasted in taking action on the matter. On November, 19th, 1956, the Sejm approved a bill which provided for the establishment of workers' councils in all state-owned industrial enterprises, state farms, and the larger transport depots. At the end of 1957, as a result of the implementation of this legislation, there were 4,647 workers' councils with 76,628 members in one third of the state enterprises. These were mostly in the larger establishments and therefore represented more than one-third of the national labour force.

The workers' councils were given authority to discuss and pass opinions on such matters as the size of production, the quality of goods, the annual factory budget, wages and bonuses, and the disposal of surplus equipment and materials, within the terms of the national plan. The law provided for the participation of the workers' representatives in the management of the enterprise. There were several guarantees to ensure that the workers' councils could withstand the pressure of the management and could act effectively and independently to defend the workers' interests. The workers' council was made responsible to the factory crew, and the statutes of the council had to be approved and adopted at a general meeting. The councils were independent of the trade unions and were made a part of the economic administration of the same level as the management. But, although subordinated in this way to the government, there was no

means by which they could be dissolved by the higher authorities or made to obey orders from above. Meetings of the council were open to the factory employees and certain matters such as the disposition of the works' fund could only be discussed at a general meeting. In some instances, where the interests of the workers were at stake, the council could conduct a plebiscite on the actions of the management. The best guarantee was the provision that at least two-thirds of the members of the council had to be workers at the bench.⁸ Although the manager was an ex-official member of the council, he was not allowed to hold the position of chairman.

The position of the manager vis-à-vis the workers' council was in all respects a peculiar one. Although he was a government official, his appointment had to be approved by the council, which could also move for his discharge. The manager was, first and foremost, entrusted with the operation of the factory and was responsible to the government for its economic results. He was also in charge of production and personnel and in these fields was independent of the workers' council. But in the exercise of all his other duties, he was bound to co-operate with the council. He was required, for example, to report to the council on the execution of its resolutions and recommendations and on the results of his own work. In some aspects of intra-mural policy, such as social problems, working conditions and regulations, and annual production targets, the manager had to abide by the decision of the council. In certain circumstances, the manager represented the workers' council and could act on its behalf so long as it approved his action. In any instances where the views or decisions of the workers' council came in conflict with the law or the economic plan or the orders of a higher authority, the manager was obliged to defy the council. A decision of the council could then be implemented only if it was upheld at a higher lever in the administration.

In July, 1957, arbitration committees were established to mediate between the workers' council and the economic administration.⁹

8 This provision was not maintained in practice. Gomulka reported to the Tenth Plenum of the Central Committee in October, 1957, that the proportion of clerical and technical staff far exceeded one-third.

9 C. R. Hiscocks, Poland: Bridge for the Abyss? p.280

The law on workers' councils was an attempt to resolve the critical condition of labour-management relations by making both sides conscious of the other's problems and of their common interest. But the Party and the government soon became aware that the councils actually created as many problems as they solved. In the first place they upset the established system of centralized planning and control of management. It became increasingly difficult to reconcile planning and direction from the centre with a substantial measure of local decision-making. The problems of on-the-spot consultation only multiplied the headaches of dictatorial bureaucrats who were not fitted by temperament or experience for the perpetual tug of war implied in the devolution of power. The routine and style of work, to which the economic administration was accustomed was a serious obstacle to co-ordination between it and the workers' councils and even between the councils and the management. The bureaucrats in the administration were not re-oriented to a system of decentralization or local autonomy and this only caused uncertainty, confusion, and inefficiency.

Furthermore, although the powers of the workers' councils vis-a-vis the management were fairly well defined, its competence vis-a-vis the trade union organizations was not so clearly delimited. There were in fact two workers' organizations dealing with the various aspects of factory life. The Trade Union works' council concerned with social welfare, social insurance, and the enforcement of labour legislation, and the workers' council, primarily a means of workers' participation in management. The powers of trade unions were not altered by the Act of November, 1956, and when the workers' councils considered any matter such as wages, social problems, and safety precautions - which was previously the preserve of the trade unions - it was required to consult with the works' council, the trade union organization.

In the course of events, the workers' council frequently invaded the jurisdiction of the works' council and a conflict of functions gradually emerged between the two organizations. The regime generally favoured the trade unions which were subject to its control, and did not encourage the workers' councils to fulfil their duties. The trade unions and the management often failed to cooperate with the workers' councils, leaving them especially to take responsibility on unpopular issues which cost them support and sympathy amongst the employees. Thus the workers' councils became involved in repeated quarrels with the unions, the management and even with higher levels of the administration, where they were regarded as a nuisance.

Many of the problems of the workers' councils were foreseen and some were actually raised by the workers themselves during the discussion which preceded the adoption of the law. But in practice, the workers' councils also encountered a number of unexpected difficulties and some substantial criticisms. The inexperience of the members of the councils in the business of management, in planning, administration, and auditing, was a hindrance to fruitful co-operation and effective control of management. In many instances factory managers, being in any case reluctant to share their authority, took advantage of this and attempted to deceive and thwart the councils in their work. More generally, however, there was not much authority to share, as the administration of the state industries remained highly centralized, and even where decentralization did take place, it was very slow. This provoked one critic to say.

"If in the very near future the system of economic administration is not radically changed, workers' councils may become one more of the Stalinists' fictions, which make a pretence of the government of the masses."¹⁰

Where the workers' councils did co-operate successfully with the management, the councillors sometimes became alienated from the mass of the employees and failed to represent their interests adequately. The strikes which occurred at many of the State enterprises during the summer of 1957, and which were organized outside the unions and the workers' councils, suggest that the councils had not always been successful as a filter for grievances originating at the bench. It appears that there were also complaints from the workers that the technical and clerical staff were over-represented on the councils.

As a general rule, however, the workers' councils seem to have been genuinely representative, freely elected, democratic in their mode of operation, and active on behalf of the workers. They concerned themselves with the interests of the workers both within and outside the enterprise. They planned and raised funds for the establishment of various types of co-operatives for workers in a given area. The government itself appeared at first to treat the councils as an important instrument in the economy, especially with regard to personnel. For example, when the Council of Ministers in the summer of 1957 discussed absenteeism, which had become a serious problem in Polish industry, it recommended that the management should co-operate with the workers' councils to find means

¹⁰ Quoted by Grybowski, op.cit., p.284

to counteract it. The government also gave the workers' council power to choose the manager of the enterprise. According to principles approved by the Council of Ministers in July, 1957, interviews for the post would be conducted by a committee composed of equal representatives of the economic administration and workers' council. The manager could only be engaged if he received a majority of the votes of the committee.¹¹

The workers' councils, however, may have become over-enthusiastic in some respects, particularly in expecting too much in the way of decentralization of power. At a conference of workers' councils' representatives held in Warsaw, it was even suggested that the fact that the workers were now participating in management indicated that they should be given some share in its ownership on a co-operative basis. Whether the councils fell from favour because they exceeded the limits of their authority, or simply because their zeal embarrassed the administration, is difficult to determine. At any rate, the extent and fervour of their activity appears to have disquieted the regime for, as early as May, 1957, Gomulka expressed certain strong reservations on the role of workers' councils in the management of the economy.¹²

In the eyes of the regime, the greatest problem posed by the workers' councils was that they presented a challenge to "the leading role of the Party". Thus, while the workers' councils were trying to find a role within the complex machinery of industrial government, the Party was striving to sabotage their authority and their independence. At the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, Gomulka advised that the trade unions should remain more important than the workers' councils and should "guide" their activities. He also suggested that Party organizations should infiltrate the councils and try to control them.

"Party organizations should provide political leadership in the work of the councils through systematic consultation with and instruction of the Party members in the councils Party members in the councils should form Party cells with which the leadership of the Party should systematically co-operate."¹³

Although this takeover bid by the Party and the Unions was stubbornly resisted by the workers' councils, their resistance was hopeless for the issue had

11 Polish Facts and Figures, 17th August, 1957

12 In his speech to the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee.

13 Speech to the Ninth Plenum.

already been decided. Gomulka had in effect warned that, unless the councils became more tractable, they would be integrated more closely with the economic administration.

Of course the workers' councils had upset the eternal communist triangle of management, trade unions and Party, and their very formation was an act of revolt against the whole industrial regime. Under the law of November, 1956, they were given a considerable degree of independence from the administration. Perhaps it was not anticipated that they would make such full use of this independence or perhaps in the exigent circumstances of 1956, the councils were granted more freedom of action than was practicable in a communist system. Whatever the case, the Party having first welcomed the workers' initiative in forming the councils, very quickly had a change of heart. It was said that "certain negative features became evident in the activities of the workers' councils" and that they showed "syndicalist-anarchic tendencies". It appears that the substance of these accusations consisted in the failure of the councils to co-ordinate sufficiently with the Trade Union works' councils and the works' committees of the Party. The official view was that "under the conditions of a society building socialism all these organizations work for a common goal. A lack of co-operation between them was bound to result in a waste of social energy."¹⁴ Preparations were thus undertaken to bring the workers' councils under tighter control.

During 1957 there was considerable discussion in the enterprises, in the press, and in the Party itself on the future of workers' councils. Finally, in April, 1958, the Fourth Congress of Trade Unions decided that, "workers' self-government is a broader concept (demanding, therefore, a broader political expression) than workers' councils. In the enterprises, there are, side by side with the workers' councils, Trade Union organs. Full co-operation and co-ordination is essential to ensure that all these organizations work together towards a proper and fruitful development of workers' self-government."¹⁵ The Congress recommended the integration of workers' councils into a more comprehensive body including the Party and Trade Union organs. In support of these changes it was suggested that it was unjustified to restrict participation in

14 Polish Trade Union News, August, 1962

15 Quoted from "Workers' Self-Government", in Polish Perspectives, July, 1958

management to the workers' councils, blatantly overlooking that the councils were elected by the workers for this purpose. It was, on the other hand, "indisputable that both the Trade Union organs and the Polish United Workers' Party represent the entire crew."¹⁶ Perhaps the most impertinent reason offered, however, was that there was "a danger of the workers' councils becoming part of the administration and losing touch with the masses."¹⁷

Almost immediately, proposed legislation, embodying the recommendations of the Congress was drafted by the Central Board of Trade Unions and introduced to the Sejm as a "private members'" bill. The bill became law by an Act of the Sejm on December, 20th, 1958. Before its adoption, the bill was submitted to widespread discussion especially in the enterprises in which "tens of thousands of trade union leaders, workers, technicians and economists took part."¹⁸ This was done to "confront its principles with the practical experience of the workers", and to ensure that the bill would "truly correspond to all the requirements which the working class expects from the institution of self-government".¹⁹ It may be doubted, however, that the workers generally "considered its contents to be correct" for there seems to have been a substantial amount of opposition from certain "elements aiming at plant anarchy". It also appears that in many establishments the workers' councils were in fact integrated with the trade unions and the Party organs some months before the bill became law.

Under the new law, the supreme organ of workers' self-government is the Workers' Self-Government Conference, which is composed of the management, the trade unions works' council, the factory Party committee, and the workers' council. According to the Act, "the employees of the state-owned industrial, building, and agricultural enterprises have the right to control and supervise the entire activity of the enterprise as well as the right to decide on basic questions.. ..."²⁰ The function of the organs of self-government are "to carry

16 Polish Trade Union News, August, 1962

17 Polish Perspectives, July, 1958

18 Jozef Kulesza, "Powers and Activity of Workers' Self-Government", Weekly Review, 25th June, 1959

19 Polish Trade Union News, October, 1958

20 Article 1, para. 1 of the Workers' Self-Government Act.

out activities among the employees, aimed at raising the economic level of the enterprise, strengthening of work discipline, augmenting production, raising the level of work safety and technical culture, increasing the responsibility of the employees for the economic results of the enterprise."²¹

In fulfillment of these duties, the Conference examines the annual balance sheets and quarterly reports submitted by the management, evaluates the factory production plans in accordance with the indices of the central plan, and decides on the use of investments from decentralized funds. It also takes decision on the improvement and rationalization of production processes, factory organization, employment, vocational training, productivity and work norms. Further, the Conference has the "exclusive right" to formulate the work regulation in accordance with the rules set by the Central Committee of Trade Unions, to organize social and cultural facilities for the employees, and to decide on the distribution of the works' fund.²² The Conference is also solely responsible for the factory housing programme, which used to be the preserve of the workers' council. Many enterprises have made ambitious housing plans, initiating sideline production of building materials and designing blocks of flats.²³

The establishment of the Workers' Self-Government Conference does not limit the powers of the manager and he is solely responsible to the government for the results of the enterprise. His position remains much the same as it was under the law of November, 1956. Only he, or a member of his staff designated by him, can issue orders and directives pertaining to the administration of the enterprise. He attends the meetings of any of the workers' self-government organs as an ex-office member, and is obliged to implement all decisions made by the Conference or the workers' council within their prerogatives. He may protest against or reject any decision which is contrary to the economic plan or other binding regulations and may appeal to the higher

21 Article 3, para. 2 of the Act.

22 The so-called works' fund was a proportion of profits handed over to the enterprise after production and profits exceeded a certain level. Usually 25% of the fund is used to finance housing projects for the employees. The remainder is used for the improvement of working conditions in the enterprise and social facilities, or given as cash bonuses to the workers.

23 Gomulka told the Third Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party in 1959, that "the achievements of workers' self-government in encouraging housing schemes should be stressed".

authorities to settle the disagreement. He is bound to furnish any information, data, secretarial help and office supplies required by the Conference or the workers' council.

Within the new system of workers' self-government, the workers' council²⁴ plays a subordinate role, mainly as an executive body of the Conference. The council is elected for a two-year term and may be dissolved by a vote of no confidence of the crew, "when its activities are clearly contrary to the interests of the enterprise and the national economy". (Art. 20) One of the tasks of the workers' council is to mobilize the crew to increase production which it does at production meetings, organized jointly with the management and Trade Union works' council. The workers' council may consider all matters that come within the scope of workers' self-government, providing they are not already being examined by the Conference and excepting those matters that are the exclusive competence of the Conference. Between sessions of the Conference, the workers' council is the decisive organ of self-government and supervises the work of management including the implementation of the decisions of the Conference. The most important work, however, is done by the Presidium of the workers' council which acts as a permanent organ of workers' self-government, co-ordinating the activities of other organs. It drafts the agenda for meeting of the Workers' Self-Government Conference and the workers' council and prepares any materials required at the meetings. The Presidium also participates in the day-to-day management of the enterprise, especially with respect to wages, piece rates, work studies and contracts for delivery, purchase, or servicing concluded outside the nationalized sector of the economy.

The workers' councils can set up commissions to investigate various matters connected with the management of the enterprise and the welfare of personnel. There are two types of commissions: temporary commissions to enquire into specific current issues, and permanent commissions engaged in long-term studies of such problems as technical change, factory organization, use of materials, and

24 Yet the number of workers' councils has tended to increase. When the new law came into force in December, 1958, there were 7,280 workers' councils in Poland. Two years later this figure had increased to 8,884 but, in December, 1961, the number of workers' councils dropped to 8,840. Although the number of workers' councils increased by only 21.4% between 1958 and 1961, their membership increased by 35.5%. Figures taken from Polish Trade Union News, September, 1962, Table 4 on pages 18-19.

employment. In addition to representatives of the workers' councils, trade unions, and the Party, the commissions usually include some members of the crew such as engineers, economists, or workers whose specialized knowledge or experience might be of help in considering the matter at hand. These commissions or the workers' council itself can conduct enquiries or prepare questionnaires to collect the views of the employees on particular or general problems. Whether these activities produce fruitful results is uncertain, but according to one authority, "the workers' self-government activity resulted in a considerable increase of work efficiency, lowering of production costs, and growth of accumulation."²⁵ At the Rose Luxembourg Electric Lamp Factory in Warsaw, the crew, especially the engineers, are said to have made valuable suggestions concerning the rationalization of departments and the improvement of production processes, safety and hygiene.

In small enterprises with only a few employees, where there may have been no workers' council before December, 1958, Workers' Self-Government Conferences have been established under the terms of the new act. Such a Conference is composed of the trade union works' council, the Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, the manager, and the youth organizations. Even on state farms, where the number of workers seldom exceeds a few dozen, workers' self-government conferences have been set up on this basis. The state farms, however, showed a lively interest in the workers' council movement in 1956 and in July, 1957, there were 1,200 councils operating on the state farms.²⁶ Where there is no workers' council, its functions are performed by the Presidium of the conference.

Although the law of December, 20th confirmed the competence of the employees to participate in management, and gave the Workers' Self-Government Conference wide powers for this purpose, the actual practice is rather less impressive. The participation of the factory committee of the Party and the trade union works' council in the conference ensures that it can be controlled by organizations directly responsible to the regime. "Contrarily to the expressed intentions of

25 Jozef Kulesza, Deputy Chairman of the Central Council of Trade Unions, op. cit.

26 Polish Facts and Figures, 3rd August, 1957.

the Party's leadership, the local Party committees often dominate the organs of the workers' self-government; the decisions of the committee are often final and are only submitted for formal acceptance by the other organs of the self-management." ²⁷

Within the conference system the influence of the workers' councils has been considerably reduced. It is supposed to be concerned exclusively with management, while the trade unions are responsible for the welfare of the workers. However, tensions often develop between the trade unions and the workers' councils. "The former sometimes become jealous of the success and the popularity of the latter and tend to extend their activities into the field reserved for the workers' council; when this happens, the workers' councils become weak and ineffective, while the rights of the workers are not properly looked after." ²⁸ Elections to the workers' councils are conducted by the trade unions ²⁹ and although they are held in secret, they are not supervised at any stage by an independent or disinterested party. In addition to its elected members, the workers' council must also include the secretary of the Party committee and the chairman of the works' council as full voting members. The law also requires that these representatives of the Party and the trade union also sit on the Presidium of the workers' council. The role of the Party representatives is to give political leadership and "to develop such activities and ensure the proper realization of the Party line". ³⁰ Although the Party line might not be acceptable to other members of the council, it may be assumed that it would take more than the normal share of political courage to oppose it directly. In case of serious disagreements within the council or the conference, the means of settlement can give little hope to those who oppose the Party line. The matter is referred to an arbitration commission consisting of equal members of representatives of the economic administration and the appropriate trade union.

As an extension of the Workers' Self-Government Conference, some state

27 Tygodnik Powszechny, English Summary, 1st April, 1962.

28 Ibid.

29 Article 25, para.1 of the Workers' Self-Government Act. In his speech to the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee, Gomulka instructed that "Trade Unions will conduct the elections to the Workers' councils, but also Party organizations should join in this campaign and they should see to it that the most valuable representatives among the factories' staff find their way to the councils". (underlining added)

30 Polish Trade Union News, August, 1962.

enterprises in Poland have established workers' courts which deal with petty crimes occurring on the premises or amongst the employees. These "workers' social courts" (Spoleczne Sady Robotnicze) began to function in October, 1960, in the Wroclaw voivodship in Lower Silesia and later in some other parts of the country. They were established in sixteen factories on the initiative of the provincial committee of the Polish United Workers' Party after a conference of activists and lawyers.

Experiments with similar institutions ³¹ had been made earlier but had failed mainly because of the poor public response. The government itself was not very enthusiastic and when the idea became current again in 1959, the Minister of Justice, Marian Rybicki emphasized the dangers inherent in such courts and urged that the question of establishing them should be considered with caution. The Polish Association of Jurists was concerned about the impartiality of the courts and one member, writing in Trybunu Ludu in October, 1959, pointed out the intricate network of personal relationships, friendships and antagonisms which existed in the small milieus in which they could operate. It would be difficult for judges to act impartially while under these pressures.

No legislative enactment preceded the establishment of the courts and they are claimed to be spontaneously created at the behest of the workers. The initiative, however, came from the Party or the Trade Union, the latter also providing advice on their structure and procedure. The worker's courts are not conceived as extra-legal extensions of the state courts but rather as a means of protecting workers from harsh penalties for minor offences (as for example, against labour discipline or of petty theft), ³² and as an integral part of the workers' self-government. Nor are they considered a threat to justice, although they do present certain dangers to the rule of law. External pressure of a political or personal nature, together with the inexperience of lay judges and lack of professional guidance, could result in disproportionate decisions by various workers' courts in similar cases, or even in miscarriages of justice.

31 In February, 1946, a decree was issued for the establishment of Citizens Courts and in October, 1955, the Trade Unions tried to establish Comrades Courts like those in the Soviet Union.

32 During the Six Year Plan, breaches of labour discipline and theft of State property drew very heavy sentences at the State courts, but despite this, the crimes did not abate.

Despite some misgivings in the administration, various reasons are given to justify the courts, particularly that they help to shape "socialist relations" amongst people in industry. More precisely, this means upholding labour discipline and protecting state property. The courts could also be justified on the grounds that the workers themselves disapprove of legal proceedings against employees for stealing state property, especially when their wages are very low and commodities are expensive or in short supply. Apparently the Party hopes that the workers' courts will help to turn the attitudes and opinions of the employees against these offences.

The structure and procedure of the courts are informal. The judging panel consists of three members³³, and the chairman reads the indictment. The accused may defend himself or appoint someone to do so and anyone present may speak for or against him. The workers generally condemn the crime, but it appears that they take a lenient attitude towards the defendants. Judgement is passed immediately, a majority, which may include a reprimand, decision being required. The courts are not empowered to pass sentences for breaches of the penal code, but may advise the authorities able to administer punishment, including the manager in a case of a breach of factory discipline. However, according to one source, the offenders consider that the public examination of a case in presence of their colleague is itself a powerful sanction. This was confirmed by a report of the Central Institute for the Protection of Labour, which apparently revealed that the workers were more ashamed when judged in the workers' court than in the state court. But there is always the danger of suspicion and bitterness infiltrating the relations between employees and destroying the conditions necessary for good teamwork.

The workers' courts in Poland have a more restricted scope than the Comrades' Courts in the Soviet Union where they have been established in agricultural collectives, villages, and urban housing areas, as well as in factories. The jurisdiction of the Polish courts is also more limited, although a law of December, 2nd, 1960 enabled them to consider cases of slander, assault and battery provided both parties worked in the same enterprise.

It is difficult to draw conclusions from the Polish experience, mainly because of the small number of courts and the limited geographical area in which

33 There are no qualifications required by the judges, except that they be over 26 years old. They are supposed to be elected by an assembly of the workers, but in practice the candidates are "suggested" by the Party works' committee.

they operate fully. Even in 1962 there were only about forty courts³⁴ of which eighteen were located in the Wroclaw voivodships, there were four each. Lublin and Zieldna Gora voivodships had three each, Poznan and Opole two each, and Bialystok and Rzeszow, one each. In Lodz, Gdansk and Bydgoszcz there were no workers' courts at all. It appears that even the Trade Unions in certain areas were unwilling to introduce the courts because of the inhospitable attitude of the workers. In accounting for the sparsity or absence of workers' courts in their areas, some Trade Union Commissions explained that the courts were not practicable in predominantly agricultural areas, others expressed misgivings about the lack of legal foundations and professional guidance, and some others (for example, Gdansk and Bydgoszcz) stated frankly that the courts could become a means of oppressing the workers.³⁵ Even in some of the areas where courts existed, they were not operational. For example, although there were four courts in Warsaw, only two were functioning, one in the motor factory at Zeran and the other in a slaughter house in Ochota. Only in Wroclaw voivodship in Silesia are the courts "properly organized" and operational.³⁶

It is also difficult to judge whether the courts have been successful in the tasks to which they were appointed namely, the condemnation of breaches of labour discipline and theft of state property and the development of a "socialist attitude" amongst the workers. Charges in the crime rate are not decisive; although theft of state property decreased during 1961, there was a marked increase in breaches of labour discipline. In an enquiry conducted by the Central Institute for Protection of Labour in Lower Silesia, 183 workers from one sample questioned thought the courts were successful while, 112 thought they were not. According to one source,³⁷ the workers show an "active attitude"

- 34 The exact number is uncertain and many of those known to exist are not operating.
35. These were some of the replies given in a questionnaire circulated amongst the provincial Trade Union Commissions by the Social Council of the Workers' Courts.
- 36 It is perhaps significant that this is part of the "regained" territories where the influence of the Party in industry is particularly strong.
- 37 Jan Gorski, in "Workers' Social Courts: a Balance and Perspective", an article in Nowa Kultura, October, 21st, 1962. Translation by Adam Straszinski, graduate student at the University of Manitoba.

towards the courts but there is some reason to doubt this. In the first place, it does not appear that the workers are anxious to make use of the courts. For example, of 88 cases which came before the workers' courts in Wroclaw between October, 1960 and March, 1961, only nine were initiated by employees.³⁸ The workers also seem reluctant to sit on the judging panel. Of one sample of 122 questioned in Lower Silesia, 96 said they could not sit on the courts, only 20 said they would.³⁹ Again, of all those questioned during the enquiry by the Central Institute for the Protection of Labour, 25% felt that the courts were against the workers' interests.

The Polish workers' courts may be an interesting experiment in concerning the people more directly in the administration of justice. The danger, however, cannot be underestimated that the courts might become oppressive or that, if they were overburdened with petty offences, they might breed resentment and contempt rather than respect. It is certainly encouraging that the Polish Association of Jurists has called for tighter legal control over the operation of the courts. Jan Gorski suggests that "if the workers' courts are to develop, they must be appropriately protected and function on the basis of adequate instruction".⁴⁰ It is disappointing, however, that he intends this instruction to be given by the Party and the trade unions.

38 33 were referred from the District Court, 26 were initiated by the manager, and 17 by other branches of the administration.

39 In fact, of 173 judges on courts in Wroclaw, only 104 were workers, while 94% of the defendants were workers at the bench. More than half the judges were Party members.

40 Jan Gorski, op.cit.

CHAPTER VThe Party

The democratization of Polish society was to be implemented in three separate but interdependent areas, namely the institutions and organizations of government, the system of economic management, and the Party itself. Democratization would be most important and most significant in the Party, mainly because of its central and overwhelmingly powerful position. For just the same reason, however, and because of the peculiar basis of its position, the Party would be the area most difficult to democratize and the least susceptible to democratic influence.

The power and central position of the Party in communist society derive from the myth of the Communist Party itself. This myth involves the belief that only the proletariat can fulfil the ultimate mission of building socialism and communism. The proletariat is a social class held together by a rigid self-discipline and a complete unity of purpose. These attributes of the proletariat are embodied in a more conscious and rational form, first in the Party, and then in its leadership, which decides all questions of policy. After the revolution, when the dictatorship of the proletariat is established, the Party, being the most conscious element in the proletariat, must assume the leading role. But this leading role of the Party, and hence the visibility of the myth, can be maintained only if the Party is united and asserts its authority over society, whether this authority be moral, coercive, or organizational. The Party must also keep in contact with the people so as to keep ahead of movements in public opinion. It is, of course, desirable that, in the exercise of its authority, the Party take account of the opinions and the welfare of the people.

In 1956, the Polish United Workers' Party, which, according to its own statutes, was the leading force of the nation, had forfeited its position. The denunciation of Stalin and the death of Bierut seriously undermined the authority of the Party which had derived mainly from these men. During the unprecedented ferment which accompanied the thaw in Poland, the Party, accustomed to a rigid and unchanging political order, and accustomed to spontaneous political activity, became paralysed and lost initiative. By 1956, faced with the collapse of its economic policies, with a challenge to its own authority, and with numerous demonstrations and resolutions calling for democratization, the Party was bewildered and deeply divided.

The reaction to the Poznan events clearly demonstrated the position in which the Party found itself. The Stalinist faction, led by Zenon Nowak.

Rokossowski, and Mazur, demanded that severe measures be taken against the riots and demonstrations, and recommended a generally unyielding attitude to the masses. They attacked the very idea of democratization as a cloak for anti-communist agitation, and a rejection of the leading role of the Party. The more liberal faction led by the former socialists, Cyrankiewicz, Rapacki, and Lange, advocated a more lenient reaction and urged modifications in the regime that would make it acceptable to the people. While the Stalinists pressed for a policy of strength and looked to the Soviet government for support, the liberals continued to favour moderation and reform, and a broadening of contacts with the masses. On August, 4th, Gomulka and some of his associates, who clearly supported the liberal faction, were invited to re-join the Party and to return to positions of power. Gomulka, who had become a national hero with a reputation untarnished by the excesses of Stalinism, was viewed by the people and the rank and file of the Party, as a desirable substitute for the current leadership. His reinstatement in the Party was a major contribution to cementing the division between the Party and the people.

By mid-autumn, when the Central Committee was anxiously preparing for its Eighth Plenum, the popular demands for change had reached the point of revolution. The people were demanding, not only essential changes in the regime, but an end to Soviet domination, which the patriotic Poles found even more intolerable than domestic oppression. The Party itself had, by this time, absorbed something of the nationalistic reformist zeal of the masses and was in a more compromising frame of mind. The people, however, could no longer be contented by half-measures, and it was indeed fortunate that the Party had in Gomulka and his friends, an alternative leadership which was genuinely popular and which resumed office in time to avert a violent uprising. Under Gomulka, the Party and the nation united, and the new First Secretary even became the spokesman of the people.

In the tensely charged atmosphere of the October days, the Party and the people drew closer than they had ever done before and presented a restrained, but determined, resistance to the threat of Soviet intervention. The whole nation, especially in the cities, rallied to support Gomulka's position. When the Stalinist faction planned to overthrow Gomulka and arrest his more prominent supporters, the workers of Warsaw alerted the seven hundred odd persons involved and forestalled the coup. On receiving news of Soviet troop movements in and

around Poland, the Polish armed forces declared themselves for Gomulka and units of the Internal Security Corps, now commanded by General Komar, a friend of Gomulka, occupied the approaches to Warsaw and the main buildings in the city, and prepared to defend the position of the new leadership. The workers of the Zeran motor factory in Warsaw, driving factory cars, kept the Party informed on the movements of Soviet troops. This steadfast loyalty and close co-operation between Party and nation was the main reason for the success of the October revolution, and raised the hopes of the people that a radical change had in fact occurred.

Gomulka did not disappoint the hopes of his countrymen. With the possibility of Soviet intervention still on its mind, the Central Committee listened as he expounded his criticism of the previous regime and his promises of a thorough democratization of the Party, and a return to legality in the methods of government. He rejected the use of administrative compulsion in agriculture and Soviet-type management of industry. Although he would not reject the communist system itself, Gomulka wanted to humanize it and win the support of the people for its continued existence. The people, for their part, accepted the Polish road to socialism which he offered them, and approved the new course he proposed. But their support was not unqualified; "it was a social contract with Gomulka, to last as long as he defended Poland's internal autonomy as well as the basic freedoms".¹ The majority of politically minded Poles welcomed Gomulka and his programme in the full realization that, in Poland's geopolitical situation, a liberalization of the communist regime, rather than its overthrow, was the most that could be expected.

In the months that followed 'October', the Party, aware of the break in relations between it and the nation and the causes of this estrangement in its own past record, made a genuine attempt to forge closer ties with the masses. A special effort was devoted to fostering a new public image of the Party as sympathizing with the democratic aspirations of the people, and defending the national integrity of Poland against Soviet encroachment. The creation of this "populist" image was a continuous process, lasting over a number of years and involving the activity of all the Party organs. It was necessitated largely by the weakness of the Party, especially of its local

1 Dziewanowski, op.cit., p.280

branches, and the ill-will it had accumulated during the previous regime. Its ultimate purpose was firstly, to strengthen the position of the Party and increase its popularity, and secondly, to integrate political life in both town and country more closely around the Party.

When Gomulka came to power in 1956, he was faced with the breakdown of Party authority all over the country and was forced to relax the communist pressure in three vital areas: freedom of expression, collectivization of agriculture, and religion. Throughout the winter of 1956-1957, some sections of the Polish press continued to outspokenly criticize the regime and enjoyed remarkable freedom to do so. The government continued a progressive closing of the rural machine stations with the sale of equipment to the peasants, and permitted the dissolution of the remaining collective farms. Atheistic propaganda was limited and very mild, the Church hierarchy was again allowed to control ecclesiastical appointments, and religious instruction was resumed in schools.

Although governmental pressure in many areas was not long relaxed, the Party never ceased in its efforts to keep the populist image of itself before the people. It continued to insist on the absolute need for Poland to pursue its own road to socialism and to avoid "mechanically copying and taking over the models and forms applied in other countries."² In May, 1957, Gomulka told the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee that the view that there was only one road to socialism was dogmatic and a product of the personality cult. Although the Soviet experience provided a valuable example, it was not always suited to the conditions in other countries. In order to increase the credulity of the new image, the regime, as early as possible, conducted a re-organization of the State apparatus and tried to develop a sense of public service amongst government officials. In his main speech to the Third Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party, Gomulka said:

"Our State apparatus serves the people, it is appointed and controlled by the people, and all state employees have to bear this in mind."³

This fact, said Gomulka, should be reflected by the state employee in his daily dealings with the public, particularly in "his sensitivity to the injuries, problems, and complaints of the citizens".

2 Resolution of the Eighth Plenum. Translation from Zinner, op.cit., p.256

3 Report of the Central Committee by W.Gomulka to the Third Congress. Translation Materials and Documents, 1959, No.4-5.

As a further part of its efforts to improve relations with the masses, the Party tried to interest them more directly and more intimately in its activities. Gomulka, especially, was anxious that the barrier of bureaucracy, privilege, and hatred, which had separated the Party from the people, should be broken down. He always emphasized that the strength of the Party was derived from "its indissoluble ties with the working class and the people", ties which would have to be constantly broadened and deepened. He was also acutely aware that the continued favour of the masses was essential to the stability of his regime. As one of his friends, explaining his policy to a mass audience and appealing for its support, said: "Your help may be urgently needed to prevent anything standing in the way of the new line".⁴

Part of this new line was to increase the participation of the people in public affairs, particularly to enlarge the scope of discussion. In accordance with Gomulka's own proclaimed policy of truth, the press was directed to supply the fullest information and to disperse doubts and combat hostile criticism, be reasoned argument and open polemics. Jerzy Morawski, himself a professional journalist, told the Congress of Journalists in December, 1956: "What matters mainly is the participation of the press in the working out of a constructive programme".⁵ Party members and activists were instructed to explain the objectives of Party policy from all angles, and convince the people of its justice and prudence. The rank and file of the Party, and even the ordinary citizens outside it, who, under the previous regime had rarely approached the outer limits of discussion on public issues, were now told that their initiative would be welcomed, their views considered, and their opinions solicited by the new government. In the provincial, district, and local organizations of the Party, independent thought and free discussion were to be facilitated. This was what Gomulka himself meant by a "return to openness in Party life".

4 The proportion of workers in the Party decreased from 62.2% in 1945 to 48.3% in 1954 and 37.3% in 1959. The proportion of peasants similarly decreased from 28.2% in 1945 to 13.2% in 1954 and 12.2% in 1959. The proportion of intellectuals increased from 9.6% in 1945 to 36.4% in 1954 and 42.1% in 1959. Although the proportion of workers joining the Party increased from 1957 to 1959, it would take a long time to change the substantial proportion of intellectuals in the current membership.

Figures reproduced from American Slavic and East European Review, Vol.19, p.66, Table 2.

5 Zinner, op.cit., p.241.

This reformed approach was most conspicuously demonstrated in the preparations for the Third Congress, during which all members of the Party were given an opportunity to discuss the problems that were to come before the Congress itself. The Congress was to be mainly concerned with the plans of the Central Committee for the development of industry and agriculture, and it was intended that the discussions would bring out the shortcomings in the plan and indicate possible improvements. The Party leaders hoped, in this way, to uncover "reserves" in the economy, that is, they hoped to find ways of eliminating the waste and inefficiency of both labour and materials, which had become a feature of the state enterprises during the Six Year Plan. Party members were encouraged to put forward their own proposals, and amendments to the new plans were welcomed so long as their basic aims were not questioned. Following the pattern of the Sejm elections, Party leaders and activists addressed meetings of citizens and workers, and answered questions previously handed in by the audience. The primary Party organizations were expected to consider matters of particular concern to their own spheres of activity, and to submit their own list of urgent problems within the framework of the general plan. The local organizations, especially in the rural areas, were instructed to include interested non-Party people in their discussions. At the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee, at which the directives for the pre-Congress discussions were issued, Gomulka said:

"It is very desirable the rural Party organizations do not limit the study of these directives to themselves, that also non-Party peasants are acquainted with them, that the opinions and views of small and middle holders are listened to and made known before the Congress takes place. This will enrich the discussion to be conducted at the Congress and will be helpful to the Party in mapping out a correct agricultural policy for to-day and tomorrow."⁶

Thus the Congress preparations became a nation-wide campaign to interest the masses and draw them into the discussions of the Party's plans for the future. It seems that Gomulka, himself, was at least satisfied with the outcome of the discussions. In his main address to the Congress, he suggested that, "it would be correct to transform this experience into an extensive and systematic method of talking to the people."⁷

6 Report of the Central Committee.

7 "Report of the Central Committee" by W. Gomulka to the Third Congress.

This general effort to popularize the Party was supported by an energetic drive to increase its membership and make it more representative by encouraging more workers and young people to join. This drive was particularly vigorous in the six months preceding the Third Congress, a fact which is reflected in the number of admissions to the Party. In 1957, 9,500 and in 1958, 23,000 persons were admitted as candidate members while, in the last quarter of 1958, and the first quarter of 1959, respectively 11,700 and 25,600 candidates were admitted. In his report to the Third Congress, Gomulka noted this growing influx of new members with satisfaction, but he still complained about the constantly declining proportion of workers in the Party.⁸ Gomulka said that this could be partly explained by advancement, since workers are classed as intellectuals when they take a sedentary job or receive positions in the Party apparatus. But he admitted that the main explanation, as it was also for the similarly declining proportion of peasants, was the weakness and inefficiency of the primary Party organizations. Gomulka also spoke of a marked decline in the number of women joining the Party and told the Congress that "this must be recognized as a serious shortcoming in Party work and everything must be done to remedy the situation."

The Polish United Workers' Party leadership was particularly anxious to attract young people, and a concentrated effort was directed to this end. The Party was seriously disturbed by the disintegration of its youth affiliate, the Union of Polish Youth (Z.M.P.), during the years of the thaw. The membership of the Union fell from 3,000,000 in 1954 to less than 100,000 in the autumn of 1956, a clear indication that the large membership of the Stalinist period could only be maintained by compulsion. Even before Gomulka came to power, the Party had begun its campaign amongst the younger generation. In August, 1956, Jerzy Morawski assured the Union Of Polish Youth that the Party recognized the importance of youth and wanted it to take part in the democratization process. The resolution of the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee stated that "the Party will help the Z.M.P. and the youth in their ardent efforts to participate as widely as possible in the political life of the country, in the ideological and organizational searchings, which will make it possible to link more closely the progressive portion of youth with the Party,

8 In the latest intake of members, there was, however, an increase in the number of workers.

and to strengthen its influence on the entire young generation."⁹ Gomulka, himself, told the Third Congress that:

"A Party worker who does not think about the future of the Party is shortsighted; work in youth organizations is, after all, the broadest highway leading ideologically committed young people to our Party ranks."¹⁰

Yet, despite strenuous efforts, the proportion of Party members under 25 years old was only 6.8% in 1958, while about half the population of the country was in this age group. The situation in the youth organizations was no consolation. The two organizations catering for the age group 16 to 30, which were founded after the October revolution, the Union of Socialist Youth and the Union of Rural Youth, had memberships of only 110,000 and 120,000 respectively. A year later, even after the intensified recruitment in the months preceding the Third Congress, these figures had little more than doubled. Furthermore, only a small proportion of the youth organizations' members were simultaneously members of the Party. At the Third Congress, Marian Renke, the First Secretary of the Union of Socialist Youth, told his comrade delegates that only 13% of his organization were members and candidate members of the Party. In fact, youth - especially students - remained stubbornly uninterested in the Party's activities and sought an escape from direct involvement in politics by concentrating their interest on literature, theatre and other cultural activities. For example, out of the 14,000 students at the Warsaw Polytechnic, only 12 were members of the Union of Socialist Youth.

Although the Party was anxious to win the favour of the masses, its main objective was to re-establish itself as the dominant political force in Poland. The resolution of the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee made this point abundantly clear. It said:

"The decisive task for the further progress of Poland toward Socialism is the strengthening of the leading role of our Party as the guiding political and ideological force of the working class, of the Polish nation, and of the people's state."¹¹

9 Zinner, op. cit., p.241

10 "Report of the Central Committee" to the Third Congress.

11 Zinner, op. cit., p.239

Gomulka himself told the National Conference of Party Activists in November, 1956, that "the Party must direct the process of democratization".¹² But before the Party could reclaim a leading position in Polish society, it would first have to put its own house in order.

The Party had been seriously weakened by the revelations and events of the thaw. Not only had it been totally rejected by the people, even firmly committed communists had been disillusioned and many had defected during this period. Furthermore, the unity of the Party had been severely damaged by the factional struggle which was especially bitter in the hierarchy itself. After the revolution there were three main factions in the Party. The Stalinist faction was still against democratization and wanted a return to Soviet directives. The revisionists wanted to end this subordination completely and even favoured a kind of multi-party system. Between them was the Pulawska group¹³ which took a middle course and supported Gomulka. The new leadership was fully aware that disunity in the ranks of the Party threatened its security and hampered the execution of its policies. The Eighth Plenum had concluded that "a major obstacle to the consistent implementation of the decisions of the Seventh Plenum was the lack of unanimity and consistency in the Politburo of the Central Committee"¹⁴ Gomulka, himself, told the Eighth Plenum that "in order that the Party should be able efficiently to fulfil its tasks and head the process of democratization, it must above all be united and of one mind..."¹⁵ Thus, conscious of the circumstances and the dangers involved, Gomulka and his associates engaged themselves in a strict review of their own and the Party's situation.

Gomulka's main concern was to restore the unity of the Party as the basis of its power and the essential condition for effective action. His task was made exceedingly difficult by the Stalinists and the revisionists, whose constant attacks threatened not only the unity of the Party, but his own position which

12 Ibid. p.285

13 The group was named after this street in Warsaw where its regular meeting place was located.

14 Zinner, op. cit., p.239

15 Ibid. p.233

was precarious for the first few months in power. Gomulka feared the Stalinists, who became known as dogmatists, because any return to a hard line would strain the Party's relations with the masses. Even more, however, he feared the revisionists because too much reliance on their support would antagonize the Soviet Union, which Gomulka knew would be fatal to his whole policy. Thus Gomulka had to wage a struggle on two fronts, on either of which defeat could destroy him. Democratization would continue in order to rid the governmental system of its abuses, while Poland would continue its alliance with the Soviet Union on the basis of equality and independence.

Gomulka began his campaign within the Party as early as possible. At the Ninth Plenum in May, 1957, he called for unity and said that he would fight both dogmatism and revisionism. He would not endanger the authority of the Party which would have to be monolithic, if it were to be equal to its historic role. In his speech he was particularly severe on the revisionists, whom he considered the more dangerous of the two factions. He replied specifically to Leszek Kolakowski, who had written an article in February, saying that the distinction between bourgeois and proletarian democracy was "harmful nonsense".¹⁶ He told the revisionists that they were pushing the revolution too far. "No party member" he said, "can accept only one part of democratic centralism, that is accept democracy and reject centralism."¹⁷

Within the Central Committee itself, however, there were only a few revisionists, although they had an indeterminate number of sympathizers. Revisionism was strongest amongst the intellectuals, especially on the press. Revisionism in the press was particularly dangerous to Gomulka, not only because it made it difficult to maintain unity in the Party, but also because it kept alive voices of dissension throughout the country. The most outspoken of the communist journals was Po Prostu, which had sniped continuously at Gomulka's regime since October, refused to heed the several warnings issued to it, and in May, 1957, the editorial board was replaced. The paper was forced to cease publication during the summer and was eventually banned in October, together with a number of radical journals in the provinces. This action resulted in student demonstrations and the resignation from the Party of a number of

16 See Hiscocks, op. cit., p.62

17 Quoted by Frank Gibney in The Frozen Revolution, p.80

leading intellectuals, including Adam Wazyk and Jan Kott, who had played a prominent part in the Ferment and upheaval of 1956.

Gomulka was no less severe on the Stalinist or dogmatist faction in the Party who strongly condemned his policy of democratization, calling it a "return to capitalism". Unlike the revisionists, the dogmatists had a substantial representation in the Central Committee and were in fact strongest in the Party apparatus itself. To Gomulka, the main difference between the dogmatists and the revisionists was that, while the latter rejected communism altogether and wished to replace it by a kind of social democracy, the dogmatists favoured a type of communism which was quite unacceptable to the people. Most of the Stalinists, however, were content to remain in the background and employ Fabian tactics in the hope that time would eventually restore them to power. But, at the Ninth Plenum one of their number, Kazimierz Mijal, launched a violent attack on Gomulka, to which the latter replied in kind. The counter-attack was very effective and Gomulka was able to mobilize the revisionists and the Pulawska group, as well as his own supporters, to inflict a resounding defeat on the 23 Stalinists in the Committee. At subsequent meetings of the Central Committee, this pattern was generally repeated. At the Tenth Plenum, for example, after a renewed attack on the revisionists, Gomulka said:

"The Party must be uniform. We shall liquidate with equal firmness all organized or individual symptoms of anti-Party activity conducted from the position of dogmatism."¹⁸

On the whole, however, the immediate threat to Gomulka's position was rather less serious from the Stalinists than from the revisionists, if only because the former played a waiting game. The revisionists, unlike the Stalinists, had many sympathizers in the country, and Gomulka feared that their criticisms would cost him some of the popularity he so urgently needed. Furthermore, the fall of the anti-Party group in the Soviet Union in June, 1957, considerably weakened the authority of the Stalinist faction and correspondingly strengthened Gomulka. The main threat from the Stalinists, on the other hand, stemmed from their strength in the Party apparatus itself, especially in the primary organizations, by means of which they could obstruct the execution of

18 Quoted by Hiscocks, op. cit., p.265

policy. Thus, when he felt that he had secured his position in the Central Committee, Gomulka decided on a purge of the lower organs of the Party, in order to ensure that they were controlled by people who were sympathetic to his views.

In order to achieve his objective of a monolithically united Party, Gomulka was forced to get rid of those who disagreed with him. He also wanted to eliminate as many as possible of the status-seekers, opportunists, and career-bureaucrats whom he hated. By the time of the Tenth Plenum, he felt strong enough to take action and announced a campaign to remove "notorious idlers, troublemakers, and demagogues". The resolution adopted by the Plenum was rather more explicit, stating that it would be necessary to free the Party from revisionists and dogmatists before the coming election of delegates to the Third Congress. The First Secretary himself told the Plenum that the Congress would be postponed until the Party had become "a conscious, militant Party, completely devoted to the cause of socialism", which, in this context, meant Gomulkaism. This campaign, which Gomulka ordered a year after coming to power, was actually foreshadowed at the very beginning of his regime. The resolution of the Eighth Plenum of October, 1956, proclaimed that the Party would have "to overcome the false liberal bourgeois tendencies among the hesitant elements, particularly in certain circles of the intelligentsia" and isolate and overpower the forces of reaction which were attempting "to aggravate the class struggle".¹⁹

The purge, when it came, was comparatively free from the cruel and vengeful features of the Stalinist variety and was, in fact, a fairly humane operation. The Party itself did not call it a purge but a "verification campaign" and it was in various ways rather less than a purge. Party members were given the opportunity to affirm their convictions or, if they so desired, to leave the Party. Those who were expelled because their continued membership was considered harmful, were simply obliged to hand in their Party cards without suffering any personal injury. There was also a general reorganization within the Party apparatus, the aim of which was to place Gomulkaists in as many as possible of the key positions. None of these considerations, of course, alter the fact that the main object of the campaign was to eliminate the dogmatists and revisionists whose activities were embarrassing to the Party leadership.

¹⁹ Zinner, op. cit., p.240

The verification campaign lasted from November 1957 to May 1958. It was conducted by commissions elected at Party meetings although, in case of "Party organizations which experienced ideological and organizational difficulties", the commissions were appointed from outside. It was the biggest campaign ever conducted within the Party and affected mainly the provincial centres where the local apparatus remained in the control of the Stalinists.

After the campaign the membership of the Party was reduced by 15.5%. 206,737 people were purged, the overwhelming majority, about 86%, being struck off the Party's records as "inactive" or "uninterested" members.²⁰ About 16% were expelled from the Party for breaches of discipline, contradiction of Party policy, and other "concrete abuses". This group also included 792 people, most of whom were classed as "revisionists", whose expulsion was recommended by the Party Control Commission "for speaking views and conducting activities contrary to the Party line". The Special Commissions to fight abuses, which were established at the Tenth Plenum and operated as part of the verification campaign, expelled 5,884 persons for such offences as theft, embezzlement, bribery, and abuse of power. Many of these cases were transferred to the Prosecutor's Office. Workers made up almost half, 47.8%, of all those expelled, while white-collar workers and peasants accounted for most of the remainder.

Gomulka himself reported on the verification campaign to the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee in October, 1958, when he said that the essential achievement had been the ideological and political purification of the Party. He was generally pleased with the results, although in "some milieux" they were disappointing. The campaign was most satisfactory in the factory Party organizations, where "the highest demands were made and the highest criteria applied". In the rural areas also, the campaign had been very satisfactory, especially since the commissions had to reckon with the pressure of the clergy against the exclusion of Catholics from the Party. Rural Party organizations even managed to increase their membership during the verification period, over one third of the admissions in the first four months of 1958 being peasants. The verification campaign was best successful in intellectual

²⁰ Gomulka gave these figures in his report to the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee.

circles and the universities where "many of the comrades showed restraint in defining their ideological and political attitude" and the meetings with the commissions often passed in silence. Gomulka later told the Third Congress that:

"Not a few of these organizations evinced considerable toleration, compromise, and liberalism, and were unable to create an atmosphere of honest discussion on the ideological attitude of a Party member."²¹

Having summed up the outcome of the verification campaign, Gomulka told the Central Committee that the persons who had been expelled could not and should not be regarded as enemies of either the Party or socialism. Most of them were basically honest people who had lost interest in the Party or were unable to cope with the duties of membership. This exceptional pronouncement highlights the humaneness and restraint with which Gomulka conducted the affairs of the Party in the post-October period and indicates an absence of personal pique in his attitude to political opponents, although it does not, of course, protect him from the charge of denying them the freedom to differ.

Soon after he resumed power in 1956, Gomulka warned the Party against "the abuse of Party criticism for personal scheming and revenge".²² He also said that it would be wrong "to remove from Party organs men only because in the past they did not carry out their duties as it is expected of them today".²³ The criteria for expelling members from the Party was generally to be their willingness and suitability to carry out the policies outlined at the Eighth Plenum. Referring to the pressing demands for changes of personnel in the Party organs, Gomulka urged caution, reminding his audience that trained leaders and activists did not "suddenly appear from nowhere".

The principles, set out at the very beginning of the regime, were generally observed during the verification campaign itself. The object of the campaign was to consolidate the position of the new leadership and to reorganize the Party as a reliable means of governing the country. This consideration alone, of course, demanded that Gomulka could not preside over a wholesale political massacre. He needed the trained leaders and activists

21 "Report of the Central Committee" to the Third Congress.

22 Address to the National Conference of Party Activists, November, 1956.
Zinner, op. cit., p.294

23 Ibid. Zinner, op. cit., p.288

if the Party were to regain its influence and maintain a dominant position in society. Thus, apart from the large number who were struck off the registers as inactive members, many of whom left of their own accord, and those expelled on various charges of corruption, the object of the campaign was mainly to exclude from the Party those who would obstruct or undermine the execution of the new policy, that is, the extreme liberals and conservatives. The campaign thus demonstrated that nothing less than conformity to the Party line could be tolerated. Gomulka, himself, emphasized that "purging the Party of accidental elements is, in a Marxist-Leninist Party, an incessant process".²⁴

At the Twelfth Plenum, Gomulka reported that the Party had "freed itself from the snares of internal controversies". He stated confidently that dogmatism, which would never have come into the open of itself, had now been unmasked and that its adherents no longer had the opportunity to practise their underhand activities. Concerning the fight against revisionism, he said that, although it had been largely successful, it had not yet been concluded. He reminded the Committee that revisionism was still the greatest danger to the Party and warned that it "always feeds on the weakness of the ideological front of a Marxist-Leninist workers' party".²⁵

At the Third Congress, Gomulka launched a strong attack on dogmatism, which, he said, had resulted in sectarianism in the Party. Although he insisted that dogmatism as a threat to the Party was dead, he warned that there were still "manifestations of sectarianism, conservatism, favouritism, or ordinary idleness", which the Party would have to constantly combat. "What is or is not sectarianism", he explained, "can only be determined on the basis of the fundamental principles of the Party line".²⁶ But if the threat of dogmatism had been overcome, Gomulka was not so sure about revisionism, which, he again emphasized, was the greatest danger. The reason for this was that:

"dogmatism cannot find for itself a mass basis of support, while revisionism still has considerable possibilities in this field"²⁷

24 Report to the Twelfth Plenum of the Central Committee.

25 Ibid.

26 Concluding Speech of W. Gomulka to the Third Congress.

27 Ibid.

Thus Gomulka was still haunted by his original fear that, even if revisionists could still appeal beyond the Party to the masses.

Nonetheless, the Third Congress marked the final consolidation of Gomulka's position. After that he could demand, and almost certainly received, absolute conformity within the Party. The internal differences which used to divide it had been resolved and no faction was strong enough to challenge his authority. The Stalinists had been crushed, at least in the higher echelons of the Party, and could no longer look to the Soviet Union for support. The liberals had almost completely disappeared, especially from the central apparatus. But Gomulka's victory had been won at considerable cost to the Party and to his own plans for democratization. The unrelenting campaign against the revisionists meant that Gomulka was forced to rely increasingly on the more orthodox, more malleable, and less imaginative apparatus members. The policy of removing those who were too radical or too outspoken, even if it were made necessary or justifiable by the Polish raison d'etat, was bound to have injurious consequences. It generally meant that they were replaced by others probably less able and more representative of the pre-revolutionary period. Since the supply of able men was no less limited in Poland than elsewhere, it is at least unfortunate that they had to be silenced. But this was the only possible outcome of Gomulka's own decision to purge the Party and make it a monolithic reflection of his own mind and a fully manageable instrument of government.

The Third Congress, which was originally scheduled at the Ninth Plenum for December, 1957, was postponed three times because Gomulka was uncertain of his support in the Party. When it eventually assembled on March 10th, 1959, it was a public demonstration of the unity and solidarity of Polish Communists. The outcome of the Congress indicated clearly that Gomulka's leadership was undisputed. The 86 speakers all confessed their faith in the new Party line and reported the growing strength of the Party in their own areas. The directives of the Central Committee on the development of industry and agriculture and the future tasks of the Party were approved. Gomulka, himself, said in his concluding speech:

"Practically all the speakers who, on behalf of the local Party organizations, spoke from this rostrum made declarations supporting the political line of the Party - - - In endorsing the general line of the Party, as adopted by the Eighth Plenum, our Congress closes in a formal manner the possibility of its being questioned by any member of the Party."

Finally, to leave no doubt of Gomulka's authority, the Congress passed a resolution, abrogating the decision of 1948 which condemned Gomulka for "right-wing nationalist deviation".

One of the most important items on the agenda of the Third Congress was the adoption of new Party Statutes, which were introduced by Roman Zambrowski. The statutes imposed stricter conditions for the acceptance of new members who were required to work actively in at least one social organization outside the Party. Admission to the Party, however, did not require a candidate to give up his religious beliefs. The statutes also contained a number of provisions which were intended to extend the scope of democracy in the Party. Elections to Party offices were to be taken on a majority vote and the leaders were placed under obligation to inform the rank and file of decisions taken at higher levels. All members were given the right to free discussion at Party meetings and conferences, the right to appeal to higher authorities against decisions of their own organizations, and the right to resign from the Party of their own free will, a right never before recognized in a Communist Party.

Democratization of the Party was, of course, one of the priority aims presented by Gomulka to the Eighth Plenum in October, 1956. The resolution of the Eighth Plenum declared that "the Party must guarantee the indispensable and hitherto improperly observed conditions of intra-Party democracy".²⁸ Gomulka hoped that, by introducing a substantial measure of discussion into the Party, he could revitalize it and arouse a new interest amongst the rank and file. But although this prescription would almost certainly have enlivened the Party, but it was incompatible with its primary function which was not so much to discuss and debate as to organize and control. Thus Gomulka's optimistic plans were soon brought to naught by the logic of communist reality. If the Party were to organize and control effectively, it would have to be unanimous, monolithic and, of course, infallible. So much was recognized by Gomulka, himself, when he instituted the verification campaign which led to the expulsion or limitation of those whose political views were contrary to his own, and effectively silenced those who would have contributed to real discussion within the Party.

Yet, paradoxically, Gomulka may not have realized the extent to which his own demands for unity and conformity in the Party were irreconcilable with free

28 Zinner, op. cit., p.241

discussion amongst the rank and file. He told the Third Congress, for example, that the experience of open discussion was, unfortunately, "not becoming the property of the entire Party in its daily activity".²⁹ This single sentence indicates that he was even then disappointed that his plans to democratize the Party were falling short of expectations. These plans, in fact, encountered serious difficulties from the first attempts to implement them. Whenever free discussion was permitted, the wide range of the opinions expressed made it exceedingly difficult and often impossible to reach any agreement or conclusion on even the simplest matters. The overwhelming majority of Party members held non-Marxist views and many even proclaimed their religious convictions. As early as the late summer of 1957, local Party secretaries were writing to the Party press, complaining of the impossibility of reconciling communist and Catholic viewpoints and the futility of discussion on any concrete matter when the very ideological foundations of the Party were openly disputed. It soon became clear that, if the Party meetings were to accomplish anything, discussion would have to become more disciplined. Where the unity of the Party was maintained it was simply by virtue of the discipline imposed by the apparatchik in control. In some of the Party organizations, free and fruitful discussion was possible, but only because it was characterized by sophistication, prudence, and restraint. But, where such self-discipline was not exercised, the progress of democratization was sooner or later arrested by the internal mechanism of the Party itself.

When talking of democratization in the Party, Gomulka frequently spoke of a return to Leninist norms. But the norms of which he spoke, namely "the election of Party authorities, the openness of Party life, the right to maintain one's own views while observe the principle that majority decisions are binding",³⁰ were honoured even by Lenin himself, more often by the breach than the observance. Like Lenin, Gomulka soon abandoned the principle of elective authorities in the Party. Certainly, Party organs and officials were elected, but the voters were given no choice and no opportunity to alter the ballot paper, although, with the unparalleled cynicism of the communists, the voting was secret. In saying that members would be able to maintain their own views, Gomulka, of course, never

29 Concluding Speech by W. Gomulka to the Third Congress.

30 Zinner, op. cit., p. 233.

intended that anyone could oppose the Party line. The resolution of the Eighth Plenum which proclaimed that no member of the Party could be compelled to renounce divergent views, made it perfectly clear that there was no place for those "whole opinions are contrary to the programmatic principles of the Party".³¹ This was taken even further in the new statutes, which said that "inner-Party democracy cannot be misused for purposes contrary to the interests of the Party"³² and specifically banned factions from the Party on the grounds that they would violate the basis of democratic centralism.

The very term democratic centralism, of course, implying a combination of freedom to dissent and unanimous submission to the organization, is a contradiction. It is a contradiction which Gomulka resolved no more successfully than Lenin himself. The very foundation of democratic centralism is unanimity in the acceptance of decisions and absolute discipline in their execution on the part of all members. Thus the statutes of the Polish United Workers' Party commend that "decisions and directives of higher Party bodies must be carried out by the lower organs".³³ Once a decision is taken, discussion is closed and no communist can oppose it because the Party is, by definition, always right. But even before a decision has been taken, sharp disagreement or debate on a proposal of the leadership may be fraught with peril because the dissentient might be branded as a heretic or even accused of the arch crime of wilfully undermining the unity of the Party. Polish communists, especially after the verification campaign, thus found that discretion was the better part of valour and wisely held their peace. Free discussion was not exactly banned, but the conditions which favoured it in the early months of the regime were gradually eroded. Democratic centralism, therefore, did not permit unrestrained debate. It became, in fact, a means of achieving unity and discipline, and hence maintaining the supremacy of the Party, even by suppressing dissenting groups who might be embarrassing to the leadership.

Gomulka not only wanted to introduce free discussion in the Party, he also wanted to streamline its structure and organization so as to make it more efficient and leave more initiative to the government agencies and primary Party organizations. In the structure of the Polish United Workers' Party, the Congress is theoretically the supreme organ, and according to Gomulka himself, only Congress can change the Party. But Congress meets but once every four years and in between sessions it delegates its supreme powers to the Central Committee, which is required

31 Ibid., p. 243

32 Section II, Para. 22 of the Party Statutes

33 Section II, Para. 17 (e) of the Statutes.

to report back to Congress at the end of its term.

In theory the Central Committee is elected democratically, and functions as the most important organ of the Party. According to the 1959 statutes it is "the highest Party body in period between Congresses, directing the entire work of the Party".³⁴ In practice, however, the Central Committee has generally functioned as a rather mysterious institution whose proceedings are very sketchily reported, although, since 1956, the main speech of the First Secretary has usually been published. Even the Twelfth Plenum of October, 1958, which finalized the arrangements for the Third Congress, was not well publicized. The minutes were issued in a limited quantity strictly for the use of Party organizations.

Although the Central Committee is supposed to be the most important organ of the Party, certain facts suggest that this is not actually the case. First of all, the Committee is too large a body to engage in useful discussion and, therefore, too unwieldy to make decisions. In 1956, the Committee had 124 members and, although this was reduced to 77 in 1959, it was still not a very manageable number. Further, the majority of the members have strenuous positions in the Party or State apparatus which consume most of their time and energy. It would appear that, for most of them, appointment to the Central Committee is a mark of prestige and status on a reward for services and loyalty, rather than a specific responsibility. Finally, the Party statutes provide for very infrequent meetings, which occur about twice a year and generally last from one to three days, suggesting that not much business is concluded by the Committee itself. Thus, although resolutions and directives are issued in the name of the Central Committee, it is more likely that they derive from the Politbureau or the Secretariat, rather than the Committee itself.

The Politbureau occupies the most powerful position in the Party. It represents the summit of the hierarchy and the highest level of decision - making, short of Gomulka himself. It sets the Party line and thus designs the policies which determine the political and economic structure and development of the country. The internal operations of the Politbureau are secret and no records of its deliberations have ever been published. But the dominance of the Politbureau may be gathered from the fact that most of the important posts in the Party and government hierarchy are held by its members. Each member is vested

34 Section IV, Para. 32 of the Statutes.

with certain definite responsibilities such that the Politbureau as a whole has absolute power over aspect of Polish society. The Politbureau elected by the Central Committee after the Third Congress numbered 12, compared with 9 in the one elected in 1956 by the Eighth Plenum. The increased number may have been related to the increased number of departments in the Party itself and possibly to Gomulka's avowed policy of ending the practice of duplicating posts within the Party.

Next in importance to the Politbureau, the Party Secretariat is responsible for the execution of policy and the day to day supervision of Party and government, including the local Party organizations and officials. In 1956, the Secretariat had grown to an enormous size and had become bureaucratized, arbitrary, and corrupt, on all which counts it was severely criticized by Gomulka. In his address to the Eighth Plenum Gomulka, in effect, accused the Secretariat of placing itself above the Party, of usurping the functions of primary Party organizations, and operating government agencies through its own departments. The function of the highest Party authorities was to establish the general political line, not to govern, and neither the Politbureau nor the Secretariat should replace the government. He spoke of the need to delimit clearly the roles of the Party and the State, and to control the activities of the central apparatus. Having heard Gomulka's criticism, the Eighth Plenum resolved that:

"The Party must speed up work on the simplification of the structure and of the change of style of work of the Party apparatus and ensure such disposition and use of Party cadres which would strengthen the activity of the basic Party organizations." ³⁵

In the light of Gomulka's criticism it is clear that, from the point of view of efficient administration alone, a drastic reduction in the Party and State apparatus was necessary. During 1957, 11 ministries were liquidated and 35,000 civil servants released at a total saving of 450 million zlotys a year. Expenditure on the maintenance of the Party apparatus was also cut down due to a reduction of some 40 - 50% of permanently salaried officials. ³⁶ Before the Third Congress there was a complete reorganization of the Secretariat in order to give substance to Gomulka's view that "the Party must not govern, but guide".

35 Zinner, op. cit., p. 242

36 Report of the Central Auditing Commission to the Third Congress, delivered by Stanislaw Stachaz.

The function of the Secretariat was now to co-operate with the government departments and supply them with background information, facts and figures, and help to solve specific problems with the aid of non-Party experts if necessary. For this purpose the Secretariat established commissions of which there were 16 in 1961, each linked to one of the government agencies. The commissions were composed of a chairman, a deputy chairman, a secretary, and an indeterminate number of members and could be permanent or ad hoc depending on the nature of their task. The Secretary of a commission was always a permanent apparatus worker from the Economic Department of the Secretariat. During the reorganization of the Secretariat, a Letters and Inspection Bureau was established. This Bureau received 16,000 letters during 1959, which resulted in 3,300 personal interviews and 600 on-the-spot investigations by apparatus workers.

The re-organization of the Secretariat brought the number of units, including the Commissions, Departments, and Bureaux up to the unprecedented number of 32. As a result of the establishment of the commissions, the number of salaried apparatus workers was further reduced and the number of departments in the Secretariat itself was reduced to ten, five of which were concerned with strictly Party affairs. But the departments still had ultimate control in the most important areas. The economic department was especially powerful, since it was able to supervise the work of the commissions through its own personnel. The most disturbing outcome of the re-organization, however, was that it was accompanied by a tendency in the Party hierarchy to replace native communists by those trained in Moscow, who were generally more orthodox and often had a thoroughly Stalinist background. Thus men like Bienkiowski and Morawski, who were among Gomulka's strongest supporters in October were supplanted. Bienkiowski was removed from the position of Minister of Education for allegedly sympathizing with Catholic views on religious instruction in schools. Morawski, who was director of the Culture Department in the Secretariat, was replaced by Krasko, a confirmed Stalinist, trained in the Soviet Union during World War II. Olszewski, director of the Economics Department, also spent World War II in the Soviet Union and served as First Secretary of the Party in Poznan at the height of the Stalinist era in Poland. Five of the remaining Directors of Departments in 1961 were similarly trained in the Soviet Union and only came to Poland with the Red Army in 1944. Perhaps the most sinister of these appointments was that of General Witaszewski to the Administration Department, which deals with

intelligence, police and internal security, and acts as a kind of watchdog for the regime. Witaszewski had had considerable experience in this kind of work, having served as Director of the Cadres Department and Chairman of the Political Board of armed forces as well as in similar positions during the Stalinist Period. He was firmly committed to the Stalinist faction in 1956, and is reported to have participated in the selection of the people to be arrested in the attempted Stalinist coup.³⁷

Thus it appears that latterly, Gomulka relied increasingly heavily on the former Stalinists in the Party apparatus. At the lower levels of the Party especially, the Stalinists remained firmly entrenched five years after October and strongly resisted any attempts to replace them, partly because they had nowhere else to go, and partly because they feared their own records being brought to light. In the Central Apparatus itself, Gomulka might have been expected to have no influence, but here also the Stalinists were in the majority in 1961. There are several possible reasons for this. Perhaps, after his experience with the revisionists, Gomulka felt safer with more orthodox communists, or he may have felt that it would be better to have such men in administrative positions, where it would be more dangerous to err on the side of liberalism than conservatism. It may also be that Gomulka, despite his "Polish road to socialism", had more in common with the Soviet-Trained apparatus Workers, since he had a brief apprenticeship in the International Lenin School in Moscow, and spent the first two years of the War in Soviet occupied territory. Yet the new Central Committee, which was elected in 1959, contained almost 80% native communists. The Stalinists' number was severely reduced, only 10 out of 23 being returned, and they were given no representation at all in the Politbureau.

Of course, in attempting to democratize the Party, Gomulka was placed in a very difficult situation. He wanted to establish close contact between the Party and the masses and to introduce a measure of internal democracy into the Party itself. But he also wanted a united, disciplined Party which would carry out his policy without question and serve as a reliable instrument of government. The two were hardly compatible, and when he launched a purge to rid the Party not only of undesirable and corrupt, but also of antithetical oppositional elements,

37 Information on the individuals mentioned in this discussion has been drawn from several primary and secondary sources.

he simultaneously demolished the possibilities of internal democracy. Similarly, by extinguishing the sparks of revisionism and silencing the advocates of a more liberal communism, he destroyed the only substantial link between the Party and the people. Thus, whatever Gomulka's patriotism, liberalism, or humanity, the logic of communism itself, the need to have unquestioned authority in the Party, and the demand that the members follow a "correct" line, carried him even further from the original ideal of a democratically functioning Party.

CHAPTER VIDEMOCRATIZATION - THE BALANCE SHEET.

The failure to democratize the Party had serious consequences for the whole project of democratization in Poland. If the Party, the ruling elite, could not be democratic in the conduct of its own internal business, there could be no hope that it would conduct the affairs of the whole nation democratically. Of course, it could not be expected that the Party would renounce its leading role, or the social and political ideology which justified that role. Yet, if the Party would not relinquish at least some measure of the control it was accustomed to exercising over society, there could be no democratization, no real freedom for other social groups, no opportunity for the unfettered participation of the people in public affairs.

When Gomulka came to power in 1956, the Polish United Workers' Party had only a very weak hold on the country. The increased influence of other groups such as the intellectuals' clubs, the Church, and even the reviving Peasant and Democratic Parties, together with the unprecedented freedom of the Press and the activity of the Sejm, gave Polish society a number of pluralistic features and modified the totalitarian character of the regime. But, as Gomulka consolidated his position in the Party and the Party itself re-established its dominant position, the pressure returned and the star of democratization gradually waned and eventually disappeared over the Polish horizon.

At first, the movement away from "October" was imperceptible. The people returned to their daily tasks as relatively free citizens, the press continued to express itself with almost no restriction, the Church was rehabilitated and Cardinal Wyszynski released. The new leadership seemed to be caught up in the enthusiasm of the people and reiterated their promises to democratize the government, to preserve Poland's independence, and raise the standard of living. From the very outset, however, Gomulka vigorously combated anti-Soviet manifestations in Poland, attacked those who expected the revolution to herald a return to "bourgeois democracy", and repeatedly emphasized Poland's dependence on the U.S.S.R. and the danger of German militarist revanchism. Such a course was perhaps only prudent, given the precariousness of the Polish situation and no sinister significance was generally attached to it at the time. But, with the wisdom of hindsight, one can see, even in these apparently harmless utterances, the influence of forces which eventually nullified the brave and optimistic hopes of the revolution. With the passage of time, it became clear that the

exciting days of October, 1956 and the few dizzy months that followed marked not only the dawn, but also the high noon of a liberal communist regime in Poland.

The first major retreat occurred during the 1957 elections. In a nationwide broadcast just before polling day, Gomulka appealed to the electors not to strike P.U.W.P. candidates off the voting lists. The burden of his argument was that an electoral defeat for the Communists would mean the end of the independence won during the revolution. In effect, he gave the people a straight choice between a diluted communism tailored to Polish conditions under his leadership and the real thing with Soviet domination. Gomulka's decision to make his appeal was almost certainly influenced by the brutal repression of the Hungarian revolt, which clearly demonstrated how far a communist country could go in the direction of reform without increasing Soviet intervention. He was probably also alarmed at the democratic enthusiasm released by the revolution and may have feared that his own party might be defeated in the elections. In any case, it appears that Gomulka at this time determined that the only way in which he could protect and consolidate the gains of "October", while executing the democratization programme within limits acceptable to the Soviet Union, was through the restoration of the Party to its dominant position. With a loyal and revitalized Party to help him, Gomulka thought that he could govern the country in a way that would satisfy both the Poles and the Russians and alienate neither. But in thus accepting the Party as the only reliable means of governing the country, Gomulka departed from the spirit, if not the letter, of his own avowed policy.

Gomulka's appeal, as it turned out, was in all probability unnecessary, for the election results were an overwhelming vote of confidence, if not in his party, at least in himself and his policy. The important thing, however, is that Gomulka feared that the revolution of which he was partly the inspiration, which his courage and statesmanship had made successful, and through which he had promised to lead his compatriots to a brighter future, might get out of control. Confronted with this possibility, which was probably less real than he imagined, Gomulka resorted to the only course he knew to be safe, deciding that democratization should come in small doses and under strict supervision. When going to the polls to use their new freedom for the first time, the people of Poland were not aware that it was already being eroded from beneath their feet.

The reassertion of the Party's authority came early. In May 1957, at the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, Gomulka directed that the Party must

attempt to infiltrate and control the workers' councils. About the same time a hard line began to be taken on radicalism in the press. Even Trybunu Ludu, the Party daily, had been something of a renegade since "October" and, when it now failed to conform, its editorial board was dismissed. The press, which had played such an important role in 1956, was now reprimanded for its outspokenness, and was instructed that its main task was to mobilize the whole nation in support of the Party's policies.¹ The official pressure was gradually increased, with the imposition of an increasingly strict censorship, especially on ideological and political matters.

Also in the early summer of 1957, the campaign against the revisionists began. The people who had been Gomulka's most enthusiastic supporters after the revolution, were now told that they did not understand the meaning of socialist democracy, that their views only brought grist to the mills of bourgeois and emigre reactionaries, that their criticism was unconstructive and "of no help". Gomulka had already alienated many of the liberals, especially the intellectuals who particularly resented his re-introduction of censorship and his incipient compromises with the Stalinists. At the Tenth Plenum in October 1957, Gomulka delivered his sharpest and most bitter attack to date on the revisionists. Foregoing his own promises of democratization, he insisted on returning to a monolithic Party and stressed the need for unity, discipline, and obedience. By this time too, Gomulka had decided on a purge and, at the Tenth Plenum, the verification campaign was announced. Thus Gomulka committed himself to the time-honoured last resort of communist rulers in pursuit of conformity. The man who, only one year before, had spoken so eloquently about "the moral basis of power", was now preparing to rule on principles that more closely resembled coercion than consent.

Yet, it appears that, during this preliminary recession, only a few people understood what was really happening. Apart from the drier tone of the press, a slight tightening of labour discipline, the renewed invective against the capitalists, and the increasing emphasis laid on the value of the Polish-Soviet friendship, the mass of the people probably noticed little change. They were not interested in the wrangles of inner Party politics, the struggle with revisionists and dogmatists, the to and fro of ideological debate. They wanted

1 In his address to the Twelfth Plenum, Gomulka stated that "the press should be faithful, active, and very efficient assistant of the Party".

only to lead their daily lives in peace and freedom, a higher standard of living, and a more certain, brighter future. It was not until October, 1957, with the banning of a number of radical journals, notably Po Prostu, that the Poles realized how far they were drifting from the ideals and hopes of the revolution. There were demonstrations in protest, one students' demonstration in Warsaw lasting four successive nights, which were dispersed by police armed with batons and bear gas bombs. The experience was a deep emotional shock, something akin to a national trauma. But everybody knew within himself that nothing further could be achieved by protests and barricades. The Poles, who had lived so long with lies, oppression, and fear, now settled down to live with disillusion and a lost cause.

At first, Gomulka seemed to draw a line beyond which he would not retreat. Behind this line were the agreement on the internal autonomy of the Church, the objective of a higher standard of living, the liberal policy in agriculture, and the preservation of Polish independence. But as the authority and supremacy of the Party were reasserted, communist propaganda, pressure and infiltration increased proportionately. Gomulka never abandoned the view that the masses have to be continuously educated and re-educated in "the spirit of socialism" and the "correct" line of the Party. He thus claimed that:

"The pseudo-theory that Socialist consciousness is being shaped automatically along with the advancement of Socialist building, thus making any agitation superfluous, ranks amongst the most stupid revisionist nonsense."²

During the pre-Congress campaign Party propaganda, which of course had never been completely relaxed, was heavily intensified. According to Gomulka the propaganda aspects of the campaign were no less important than the organizational. The task of propaganda was to popularize the policy of the Party, while task of organization was to mobilize the people to support it. Thus, although the rank and file members and many non-Party people were deliberately drawn into the pre-Congress discussions, the object of this was not so much to encourage debate on Party policy as to indoctrinate the masses. At the Congress, itself, Gomulka reported that, during the preparatory campaign, Party activists had "gained much experience in the art of convincing the masses".³

2 Gomulka's address to the Twelfth Plenum, October, 1958. Translation from Materials and Documents, No. 16, 1958.

3 "Report of the Central Committee!" Underlining added.

As the Party quickly regained the monopoly of political propaganda, the volume of communist infiltration in mass organizations was also increased. Trade Union, women's, scientific, cultural, and cooperative organizations, to mention only some of these named by Gomulka, were advised to support the course mapped out by the Party. Workers' councils and youth organizations were the first to be systematically subverted, but their fate soon became the common lot. At the Twelfth Plenum, Gomulka directed that:

"Party work in mass organizations should be intensified, above all through the Party teams active in mass organizations these teams should secure a uniform and persistent representation of the Party attitude and influence the activities of mass organizations so that they should develop in the proper direction." ⁴

The intensification of propaganda and the renewed insistence on conformity to the Party line was first perceived and most resented in the intellectual circles. This is as might have been expected, since the intellectuals had most to lose by the curtailment of free expression in political, social, and cultural matters. Although the restrictions never became so crippling as in the Stalinist period, and although Polish literature and the Polish press, even in 1959 and 1960, were considered rather too revisionist in the Soviet Union, the Polish intellectuals felt no less justified in their resentment.

For the first year at least after "October", intellectual and academic freedom were almost unrestricted except on matters concerning the Soviet Union. Polish professors, writers, and artists encountered little censorship and were free to travel, speak, and write in the West. One writer, Marek Hlasko, was even able to publish in Paris, early in 1958, a book which bitterly attacked Communist rule in Poland. Also in the spring of 1958, Wladyslaw Bienkowski, Minister of Education and a close friend of Gomulka, addressed a Chatham House meeting in London and spoke candidly, at least for a Communist official, of the current problems of government in Poland. ⁵ Earlier, in February, 1957, Oscar Lange delivered his famous lecture, "Some Problems relating to the Polish Road to Socialism", which was pertinent and objective and contained little of the dogmatic obscurantism, characteristic of communist expositions on political subjects.

4 Address to the Twelfth Plenum, October, 1958.

5 The address is published in International Affairs, London, April, 1958.

Such freedom was probably too all-embracing to last, especially when the remainder of the Communist bloc was constantly attacking Polish revisionism and even Gomulka himself. Late in 1957, the Secretariat began to re-establish its supervision and control over education and culture. Writers and journalists were told that their task was to support the Party in the construction of socialism, a sure indication of a less lenient disposition in the government. It was now more clearly emphasized that youth must be educated in the spirit of socialism. Gomulka later defined this as "the transformation of its social consciousness" and "the assimilation by youth of a Marxist world outlook and a rationalist manner of thinking".⁶ University lectures, especially on such subjects as history, philosophy, sociology, and economics, had to "be conducted exclusively in the spirit of Marxism".⁷ At the Third Congress, Gomulka said that the cultural line of the Party was "correct" and announced that:

"The Party's chief task on the cultural front at the present moment is to struggle for the total elimination of the influence of anti-socialist and revisionist tendencies in the creative circles."⁸

After this the interference and censorship of the Party became increasingly familiar to Polish intellectuals. Compulsory lectures in historical materialism were re-introduced in schools and universities in 1960 and the indoctrination of youth was progressively intensified. Generally speaking, freedom for science and scientific research remained, but in the humanities, where freedom is most significant, it became more and more restricted.

As the Party regained its monolithic unity and re-asserted its authority, it also imposed stricter limitations on the freedom of religion and the autonomy of the Church. The agreement between the Party and Church hierarchies, concluded in December 1956, worked satisfactorily, with periodic frictions for approximately eighteen months. That such an agreement worked at all was, of course, remarkable; that it should eventually break down was predictable, if disappointing. That it worked for as long as it did was entirely due to the

6 Gomulka gave this definition in an address to the Second Congress of Socialist Youth, April 25th, 1960. Quoted here as reported in Polish Facts and Figures, 14th May, 1960.

7 Gomulka: "Report of the Central Committee" to the Third Congress.

8 Ibid.

special circumstances in Poland after "October", namely, the renaissance strength and influence of the Church, the corresponding weakness of the Party and its urgent need of popular support; and it may even have continued longer with a more docile, more timorous, and less outspoken clergy.

It is difficult to set a date for the demise of this strange entente, for it was due to a series of minor blows, rather than a single fatal stroke. From early in 1958, the outspokenness of the clergy led to a number of retaliatory pinpricks. Religious pamphlets were confiscated, religious instruction in schools was hindered, and anti-clerical propaganda was intensified, the clergy being associated with the "reactionary circles". In the first six months of 1958 there were about 600 cases of priests being tried for "administrative violations" and in June, 1959, the Bishop of Kielce was suspended on charges that bore a sinister resemblance to those brought against the clergy in the period before the revolution.⁹ Yet, Gomulka told the Third Congress in March that the Party regarded religion as "a private matter" and urged that the Party "should guarantee religious tolerance and freedom of conscience" and oppose discrimination on grounds of religion. Despite this, however, the pressure on the Church was gradually increased from 1959 to 1961. In an interview given to Le Monde in October, 1961, Gomulka said somewhat regretfully that religion was still "deeply rooted among the greater part of the population". He admitted that it would be absurd to try to change this situation "by means of administrative measures", but added that "we do not want nuns and devotees to permeate our children with fanaticism".¹⁰ Although the Church was still able to survive in 1961, its independence was severely limited and its future uncertain.

As the Party waxed in strength and confidence and grew less dependent on popular support, it progressively re-established its supremacy and restricted the activities of other groups and organizations which might challenge its monopoly of power. Thus the scope of potential pressure groups was limited, alternative avenues of expression controlled and the pluralistic features which

9 This information is drawn from the speech of the Minister of Internal Affairs, W. Wicha, to the Third Congress of the P.U.W.P. and a leading article, entitled "Walking Delicately", in The Times, 8th October, 1959.

10 As reproduced in Polish Fact and Figures, 28th October, 1961.

had been manifested in Polish society since the latter stages of the thaw were gradually eroded. As "October" receded, democratization became more of an appearance and increasingly less of a reality. Every sphere of political, social, and cultural life which had been democratized was counterweighted by the omnipresent intervention of the Party. Democratic forms did not assure democratic government for popular institutions were blended with authoritarian controls so that freedom became possible only within the narrow limits permitted by the regime.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the organization of government and the practice of the Sejm. In 1956, Gomulka specifically promised to democratize the system of government and elevate the Sejm to the position of supreme organ of state power. Five years later it appeared that the government departments were more independent but they were still doubled by the commissions of the Central Committee, which were controlled by apparatus workers from the Economic Department of the Secretariat. The Sejm itself had regained some of its prestige and influence and, although it was not a parliament in the Western sense, its role was impressive by Soviet standards. But de facto legislation was by the Party, debate in the Chamber was inhibited and restricted and control of the government was more procedural than substantial. It has even been reputed that newly elected deputies were being trained in a Party controlled school in Warsaw in the finesse of Communist parliamentary procedure.

It was probably in the establishment of workers' councils in 1956 and the governments initial approval of the movement for workers' self-government in industry that there was the most hope for democratization and perhaps also the most bitter disappointment. Of course, few people would disagree that a committee of workers is not the best means by which to run an industrial enterprise. But no official pronouncement on industrial government and neither the Workers' Councils Act of 1956 nor the Workers' Self-Government Act of 1958 left any doubt that the principle of one-man management would be upheld in Polish industry. The ultimate authority and the ultimate responsibility remained with the manager. The workers' council was only intended to represent the interests of the employees and give them a say in the making and execution of managerial decisions. But the members of the workers' councils generally lacked the training and experience to cope with the problems of management and the managers often took advantage of this to circumvent and even undermine the councils. In

any case, the operation of the workers' councils and the workers' self-government eventually fell far short of the expectations of both the workers themselves and foreign observers. The restriction of their authority, their subordination to the Trade Unions and the introduction of tighter Party control reduced their effectiveness and the workers latterly lost interest in them. The most that could be said of the system of workers self-government is that it gives the appearance, though little of the substance of industrial democracy, that it might act as a safety valve for unrest, and that it provides the means of workers' participation in management that might be revived at any future date.

Despite the generally gloomy outcome of democratization, there were some bright spots. The gains and achievements of 1956 had not been completely destroyed. The Party dictatorship had been mitigated and humanized and mass terror as a major instrument of government had disappeared. Catholic deputies sat in the Sejm and were able to criticize government actions in certain details, though not in principle. Freedom of expression in conversation had been preserved and the Catholic press was still allowed to publish though on a restricted circulation. Western newspapers and periodicals were still being sold openly. In 1960, Poland imported 11,433 titles, of which 8,974 were from Western countries. This was a 17% increase on the figure for 1959.

Yet the people of Poland were dismayed, frustrated, and uncertain of the future. (As an index of frustration, the per capita consumption of hard liquor was one of the highest in the world.) The hopes of 1956 had been disappointed and the bright promises of the revolution had largely evaporated. It seemed that Gomulka himself had given up his programme of democratization and settled for the easier lot of a conventional communist ruler. Of course, the limits within which democratization was possible, especially in politics, were set by Poland's geographical position and the realities of power politics. In a way the problem of democratization was a vicious circle. No fundamental and permanent changes were possible while Poland remained in the Soviet orbit. On the other hand, any attempt to leave the orbit would be national suicide, as the Hungarian revolution so tragically demonstrated.

Significant of the retreat from "October" and the forces causing it was Gomulka's changing attitude to the Soviet Union. Latterly, he spoke more of the solidarity of the communist bloc and the firmness of the Polish-Soviet

alliance and less of independence and the Polish road to socialism. "Independence", however, was still a powerful slogan in Poland and Gomulka had to identify it with adherence to the socialist camp. Thus the U.S.S.R. was presented as the only power capable of safe-guarding Poland's Western border. The alliance with the Soviet Union was a condition of Poland's survival.

But the limits of democratization were not all set from the outside. They were implicit in the very nature of the Communist system, Polish as well as Soviet. The Party could not permit complete or even partial freedom to any other social or political organization, even if that organization were its own creature, for fear that it might threaten and eventually usurp its own power. Thus Zenon Kliszko, member of the Politbureau and perhaps Gomulka's closest associate, told the Third Congress of the P.U.W.P. that:

"Socialist democracy may develop only in close association with the limitation and ousting of ideological - political influences hostile to socialism and also through the steady growth of the influence of socialist ideology on the broad working masses."¹¹

This, however, was all implicit from the very beginning. The resolution of the Eighth Plenum itself stated clearly:

"Freedom in our country can only serve the working people, the creators of a new socialist system. For the enemies of socialism and the rule of the working people, there can be no freedom."¹²

The "working people", of course, is the conventional euphemism for the Party and five years after "October", the full meaning of this extract had become abundantly clear.

The ultimate conclusion is that, however democratic the institutions may appear to be, whatever concessions may be made at a time of crisis, and however much the Party may accommodate itself to freedom of action and expression for other groups and organizations, when its own position is weak, there can be no real or permanent democracy in a communist country, because the Party can permit no challenge to its own supremacy.

11 Polish News Bulletin, 19th March, 1959.

12 Zinner, op.cit., p. 247

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