

The Factors Behind the Upheaval in Poland

By JOSEPH CLARK

EVEN CORRESPONDENTS for the commercial press in Warsaw report that the Polish people have no desire to go back to the prewar semi-fascist, pro-fascist, pro-groom ridden regime. Liberation from Hitlerism also meant freedom from landlords and corrupt capitalists who had kept Poland poverty-stricken and its people oppressed.

All accounts confirm that Polish demonstrators are insisting on friendly relations with the Soviet Union, but only on the ba-

sis of Polish independence and equality.

Even the Poznan demonstrators, Gomulka pointed out, "did not protest against socialism when they went out in the streets. They protested against the evil which grew widely in our life, against deforming the basic principles of socialism."

How explain the Polish upheaval? It would seem that three factors brought it about.

First was the past suppression of democracy and the present determination to democratize

Poland.

Second was the low living standard of the working people and the present determination to change this.

Third was the past infringement of Polish sovereignty and present determination to be independent, maintaining a friendly alliance with the Soviet Union based on equality.

Like all great forward moving events in history this one combined a mass movement of the people and a leadership which properly sensed the mood of the

people so it could march at its head. "We used to talk in whispers," said a militant worker of the Rosa Luxemburg factory in Warsaw. Now his voice rang loud and clear at a mass meeting endorsing the reorganization of the United Workers (Communist) Party.

It was a harsh and unwelcome fact that the Polish Sejm, the top legislative body, had for a long time exercised no real power or authority. And the elections to this body—as to many others—were largely farce because the

voters had little choice in naming the candidates and there were no competing candidates. The Sejm met for a few days during the entire year, conducted a perfunctory debate, and didn't really fashion the laws of the land.

However, during the past year or so the national legislative body and also local government have been revitalized. Genuine debates took place at the last session of the Sejm. Parliamentary committees held intensive

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hearings before preparing legislation. And now the new leadership, headed by Gomulka has promised that the Sejm will "exercise the supreme legislative and controlling power" in the land. And the Poles have said even before the recent events that the national elections on Dec. 16, will have competing candidates.

Furthermore, the Communist Party will not govern the country, it will lead, by example, by inspiration, by the power of its ideas and not by imposing these ideas.

THE ROOTS of Poland's economic difficulties were disclosed not long ago by one of its outstanding economists—Oskar Lange. He put it in two words—war economy. And the Polish Communists make no bones about the distortions of the economy resulting from the cold war. They explain very carefully, not only the responsibility of the imperialist powers, particularly of Washington for creating tensions, rearming West Germany and maintaining the cold war. But they also add that an overestimation of the imperialists capabilities and an underestimation of the strength of socialism and of the peace forces led to self-imposed distortions of the economy.

Furthermore, the Polish Communists believe that a fetish was made of the emphasis on heavy industry. Not that they don't agree that industrialization requires the development of such industry. But as Gomulka put it in his speech:

"It is not permissible to favor within our national economy one of its branches at the expense of others, because the loss of proper proportions does great harm to the economy as a whole."

It is another cold and harsh fact that Polish workers' standards are low and that since 1950—the period of the Six Year Plan—there has been no improvement. For example, Polish work-

ers' delegations who visited Yugoslavia said they thought living standards in Poland were somewhat higher than in Yugoslavia. But they add ruefully, that whereas Polish standards remain where they were in 1950 the Yugoslavs have improved theirs.

Low wages and poor working conditions were at the bottom of the Poznan demonstrations. And the Polish workers felt renewed confidence in their leadership when they heard Gomulka say the other day:

"The working class taught the Government a painful lesson. Poznan workers demonstrating in the streets called out with a loud voice: Enough of this, one cannot live like this, we must return from the wrong way."

AS TO THE third question, independence and full equality, a thoroughly abnormal situation existed from 1948 to the death of Stalin in 1953. The exclusion of Yugoslavia by the Cominform, and the Soviet economic pressure and political campaign against Yugoslavia, were an extension of Stalinism to international relations. Gomulka put it this way:

"In such conditions, could the personality, even the Party could work only at the cost of becoming totally subjugated to the main personality cult."

"If somebody tried to go outside the bounds he was excommunicated by his comrades. If it was a whole Party, it was made anathema by other Communist Parties."

"In such conditions, could the relations between the Communist Parties of the countries of peoples democracies and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union be based on the principle of equality? It is clear they could not."

Gomulka gave a restrained and dispassionate account. But the infringement of sovereignty was particularly evidenced in his own case. It was the Soviet police chief who helped concoct the fantastic frameup charges

which landed Gomulka in jail, as it brought death to Rajk in Hungary, Kostov in Bulgaria, Slansky in Czechoslovakia. Whenever you talk to a Polish Communist he says, just a little proudly, but at least we didn't execute Gomulka.

It is tragic aspect of Polish-Soviet relations that the appointment of Soviet Marshal Konstantine Rokossovsky as Polish Defense Minister aggravated relations between both countries. It is tragic because Rokossovsky himself was a genuine hero of the war against Hitlerism and one of the great generals of that war. Furthermore, Rokossovsky was himself a victim of Stalinist frameup. On the eve of the German attack against the Soviet Union Rokossovsky was in jail, as Khrushchev revealed in his special report to the 20th Congress. Even though Rokossovsky was born in Poland it always rankled among Poles that the commander of their forces was a Soviet citizen.

THE ISSUE of equality and non-interference among Communist parties and socialist states was thrashed out in the historic meeting of the Yugoslav and Soviet leaders in the Spring of 1955. The reconciliation looms ever greater in importance as a milestone of correction in the history of the world Communist movement.

A terrible evil that grew particularly in the last years of Stalin's activity, was uncovered and condemned by the joint Soviet-Yugoslav declaration. The process was carried still further by the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. Today Communists stand only at the beginning of this process and at various levels in different countries.

Real independence creates the conditions for a renaissance of the socialist lands and the strengthening of the Communist parties. And for the West it opens up new perspectives for Marxism, especially in Italy and France. That's a subject for another column.