

Originating on the Baltic seacoast, the now-outlawed trade union Solidarność (Solidarity) claimed at one point to represent 10 million of Poland's 13 million workers. Led by Lech Walesa, who had been involved in the 1970 and 1976 disturbances in Poland, Solidarity received broad support from Western labor unions — and over \$185,000 from the AFL-CIO.

Poland

“Humanity must rejoice and glory when it considers the change in Poland.” The sentiments of Britain’s Edmund Burke were echoed by many Western politicians during the 16-month heyday in 1980–81 of the independent trade union Solidarity. Burke was referring to Poland’s adoption of the liberal “May Constitution” in 1791—a development that ultimately provoked Russia and Prussia into dismembering Poland in 1793. Two centuries later, the rise of free labor unions and the easing of constraints on political life were seen as a threat by both the Soviet Union and the regime in Poland itself.

What came to be called the “Solidarity period” began in July 1980 when Edward Gierek’s regime suddenly increased the price of meat. Popular protest initially took the form of scattered strikes around the country. Then, in mid-August, 16,000 workers seized control of the vast Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk. Led by an unemployed shipyard electrician, Lech Walesa, the Gdańsk strikers virtually shut down Poland’s major Baltic seaport. Soon, Walesa and his colleagues found themselves at the head of a nationwide movement that pressed for sweeping political and economic reform. The regime gave in. Under the Gdańsk Agreement of August 31, the communist government, in return for an end to the strikes, promised to recognize independent, worker-run trade unions, to honor the right to strike, and to relax censorship.

Solidarność—Solidarity—came alive, and so did Poland. Gierek resigned. The autumn air carried an intoxicating whiff of freedom. The Sejm, Poland’s Parliament, long a rubber-stamp legislature, began demanding real power. University officials started to insist on true academic freedom. Major newspapers began printing some straight news. Films banned for years started appearing on television. The Solidarity period was a time of extraordinary political and cultural ferment.

Walesa himself knew it would not last. On December 13, 1981, in a move that had been quietly planned for months, Gen-

eral Wojciech Jaruzelski, now First Secretary of the Communist party, declared martial law and arrested Walesa and 6,000 Solidarity leaders and supporters. In time, the independent union was officially suppressed. The crackdown was unrelenting and, despite strikes and occasional flare-ups of violent opposition, successful—at least in the short run.

The long run may be another matter, our three Polish authors make clear as they discuss the party, the economy, and the intelligentsia.

THE PEOPLE VERSUS THE PARTY

by Leopold Unger

What, Confucius was once asked, are the essentials of government? "First," the philosopher replied, "the people should not go hungry; second, the army should be powerful; and third, the government should enjoy the trust of the people." Which of these elements, the questioner continued, might be sacrificed in a pinch? "First," Confucius said, "I would do without the army; then I would sacrifice the people's food, since starvation and famine have existed since the dawn of mankind; but where there is no trust, common people will have nothing to stand on."

Confucius, of course, was unable to take into account 35 years of absolute Communist rule in Poland, where the Army is powerful, but shortages of food and trust persist. The people have "nothing to stand on," but the regime still endures. As far as Poland is concerned, it was not only Confucius who was wrong but also Stalin. In April 1945, he told Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, "This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise." Thirty-eight years later, Soviet troops are still stationed in Poland, but Soviet ideas, though duly imposed, have yet to take hold.

What Poland's Communist masters failed to understand from the beginning is that Poland is a people before it is a state; it is the Polish people rather than the Polish state that has, over the years, lent coherence and continuity to the history of "Poland." For as a political entity, Poland's evolution has followed a

tortuous course, often dictated by outsiders. As anyone familiar with European history knows, Polish territory was long treated as a kind of modeler's clay, sculpted (and diminished) by powerful neighbors. My own parents, for example, were born and married in the city of Lwów and never moved from there; yet what was Poland when I was born had been part of Austria when they were young, and was controlled by Germany when they were killed. They were buried in an unmarked grave in the city of their birth, which is now within the Soviet Union.

Of course, politically if not physically, the rest of Poland today also lies within the Soviet Union, even though a "sovereign" state has been reconstituted and can be found on any map of Europe. The state in question is ruled by the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, or PZPR). The chief source of discord in Poland today, of spiritual discord in particular, is that the Polish Communist party is not and has never been Polish—not Polish, at any rate, in a sense that would be understood by most Poles.

Poland is no stranger to travail. Thrice during the late 18th century, her powerful neighbors—Russia, Prussia, and Austria—carved her up and feasted upon various portions. For more than 120 years after the Third Partition in 1795, Poland as such did not exist at all. Neither the Duchy of Warsaw (1807–15), established by Napoleon, nor the Congress Kingdom (1815–64), established by the Congress of Vienna (and dominated by the Russian Tsar), altered this fact. Nor did two ill-fated uprisings (in 1830–31 and 1863–64) or the revolutionary ferment of the Spring of Nations (in 1848–49). Nevertheless, the Polish people continued to insist, or at least to hope, that their dead state would one day be reborn. And from the ashes of World War I, so indeed it was.

Two groups in Poland, however, were adamantly opposed to the state's rebirth. The groups in question were Rosa Luxemburg's Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, and the Polish Socialist Party Left (the left-wing faction of the Socialist Party). "The slogan of independent Poland," declared the socialist newspaper *Nasza Trybuna* on November 2, 1918, just days before independent Poland was established anew, "is the axis around which gather the powers of the social reactionaries." In the view of extreme leftists, economically depressed Poland was ripe for proletarian revolution. Creating a bourgeois state would only delay the inevitable; it would constitute, moreover, an obstacle to the triumphal march of communism from Russia to Germany. In December 1918, the Social Democrats and the Polish Socialist Left merged to form the

Communist Party of Poland.

The Polish Communists regarded the new Polish Republic as illegitimate: "the easternmost segment of Western imperialism." They refused to seek legal sanction for their new party—though it would have been forthcoming—and boycotted the January 1919 election of a Polish Parliament, the Sejm. Having failed to register, the party was declared illegal and forced underground, where it stayed until 1944–45.

Instinct for Self-Destruction

At odds with Lenin (who, ironically, recognized the potency of Polish nationalism), Luxemburg redirected her efforts towards Germany. Ethnic Poles then high up in the Soviet hierarchy—notably, Feliks Dzierzynski and Józef Unszlicht, creators and chiefs of the Cheka, Lenin's secret police and forerunner of the KGB—were able to exercise increasing sway over the Polish party. When the Polish-Soviet war broke out in 1920, the Polish Communists insisted that it was not a contest between two sovereign states but instead a struggle for socialist revolution. Calling unsuccessfully for a general strike, the party urged its members to sabotage the Polish war effort and work to aid Bolshevik Russia. General Józef Piłsudski's "miracle on the Vistula"—his stunning defeat of the Red Army in the battle of Warsaw—dashed Communist hopes.

From its very inception, then, the Communist Party of Poland found itself out of step with the desires of most Poles. "With you, gentlemen," Polish Socialist Party leader Mieczysław Niedziałkowski told the Communists in 1923, explaining his refusal to join them in a united front, "one never knows if you are genuine political workers or agents of the Russian government." The question continues to be asked.

Regardless of the integrity and courage that many of its activists displayed, the Polish Communist Party was permanently fixed in the role of the outcast. Few rallied to its banner. It is difficult in 1983 to evaluate the strength of an illegal and under-

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ground political party a half-century ago, but the most credible statistics indicate that out of a Polish population of some 20 million, the Communist Party could boast only 5,000 members in 1922; 15 years later, despite "favorable" economic and social conditions, it had fewer than 4,000.

And the party was caught in a trap: The more unpopular it became, the more it had to rely on the Soviet Union; the more it did that, the more unpopular it became. During modern Poland's first fling with parliamentary democracy (1918–26), and then during Piłsudski's military dictatorship (1926–35), the party proved unable to break out of this vicious cycle. And it manifested from the outset an instinct for self-destruction, as when, in 1932, at the Party Congress held in Belorussia, the Polish Communists openly commiserated with the German Communists on the "Polish occupation of Upper Silesia." Eventually, the Polish party became a creature of the Comintern, the Communist International. And after Stalin consolidated his power during the late 1920s, the Comintern served as little more than an instrument of the Russian government.

The internationalism of the Polish Communist Party was not enough to protect it from a dramatic end. Two blows removed it temporarily from history.

First, during the Great Purge of 1936–38, Stalin executed or



The First Partition, 1772: Poland's last King, Stanislaw-August Poniatowski, despairingly clutches his crown as Russia's Catherine the Great, Prussia's Frederick the Great, and Austria's Joseph II divide nearly one-third of the Kingdom of Poland among themselves.

MODERN POLAND



interned several hundred Polish Communists who happened to be on Soviet soil. Many Communists living abroad were lured back and executed. Of the 37 members of the Polish Communist Party's Central Committee elected in 1932, 30 perished, including the entire Politburo and Secretariat. (The few survivors, including Władysław Gomułka, a future First Secretary of the Polish party, owed their good fortune to the fact that, as members of an illegal organization, they were languishing in Polish prisons at the time.) Then, in 1938, on the pretext that the Polish party had been infiltrated by Polish police agents, Stalin dissolved it altogether.

There was, perhaps, a silver lining. Since it had ceased to exist, the Communist Party of Poland was spared the ignominy of having to endorse (as other Communist parties would do, after performing awkward ideological contortions) the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact signed on August 23, 1939. A week later, on September 1, came the German invasion of Poland—and World War II. The Polish Army, though it resisted valiantly, crumbled after a few weeks. The Red Army's attack from the east, launched on September 17, sealed the country's fate. By late September, Hitler and Stalin had split the conquered nation between themselves, like the partitioning powers of yore.

The "Fourth Partition" was roughly along the Bug and San rivers. Germany took more than half of Poland and most (22 million) of its people. Part of the German conquest was formally incorporated into the Reich; the rest was treated as, in Hitler's words, a "vast Polish labor camp." All Jews and most educated Poles were marked for extermination. The concentration camps at Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek and elsewhere were in operation by 1942.

The Poles in the Soviet-occupied sector of their country hardly fared better. Several hundred thousand were deported and imprisoned in distant parts of the Soviet Union. Many others were killed. Most of the 15,000 Polish officers taken by the Soviets as prisoners of war disappeared. Stalin's foreign minister, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, boasted in October 1939: "Nothing is left of Poland, this ugly offspring of the Versailles Treaty."

But, already, the Polish resistance had begun. A government-in-exile was formed in Paris, with General Władysław Sikorski, politically a man of the democratic center, as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief. Representatives of the Socialist, Peasant, and National parties were included in the government, which fled to London after the fall of France in June 1940. In Poland itself, the underground Armia Krajowa (Home Army) resisted the German occupation.

Looking Ahead

After Operation Barbarossa—the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941—Moscow changed its tune. The "imperialist" war fomented by the British and French "warmongers" now became the "Great Patriotic War," and Britain and France became valiant allies. By the end of July, the Polish government-in-exile, under strong British pressure, uneasily reached an agreement with the Kremlin. The Soviets renounced the 1939 partition and gave "amnesty" to their Polish prisoners, allowing them to form a Polish Army, which fought in Africa and Italy.

Looking ahead, Stalin realized that a Polish Communist party would again be useful. He also recognized that his de facto (if short-lived) alliance with Hitler and his participation in the dismemberment of Poland—not to mention the old Polish party's extreme unpopularity—made it inadvisable to use the word "communist" in the new party's name. And so in the beginning of 1942, the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, or PPR) and its military arm, the Armia Ludowa (People's Army), came into existence. The new group's Moscow-trained leaders—

notably Marcei Nowotko and Paweł Finder—were parachuted into German-occupied Poland to direct the underground movement. Of course, the Soviets remained uneasy about Polish Communists, particularly when operating beyond Moscow's physical reach. It is not surprising that both Nowotko and Finder soon met violent deaths—at the hands of comrades—under circumstances that have never been officially explained.

Stalin maintained his alliance with Sikorski's government only as long as necessary. After the Russian victory over the Germans at Stalingrad in early 1943, Stalin rejected Polish claims to prewar Poland's eastern territory. When the Germans in April announced discovery of the Katyn massacre—they had unearthed a mass grave containing the bodies of 4,250 Polish officers slain by the Russians in the Katyn forest near Smolensk—Stalin used the request of the government in London for a Red Cross investigation as an excuse to break off relations. In July 1943, Sikorski died in an air crash, and Stanisław Mikołajczyk, a leader of the Peasant Party, became Prime Minister.

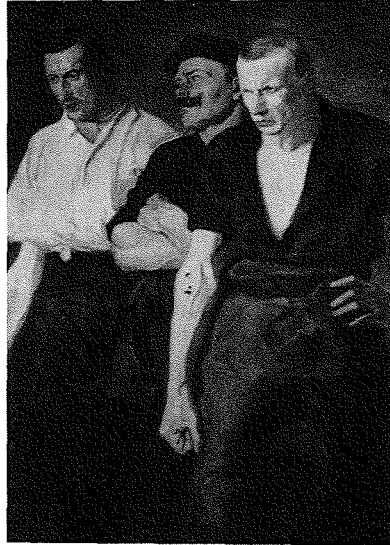
As the Red Army in the spring and early summer of 1944 neared the Moscow-recognized boundary with Poland (roughly the so-called Curzon Line, suggested by British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon in 1919), the Soviets began molding a subservient Polish "government," using underground PPR members but with trusted Poles from Moscow brought in to run the show: Bolesław Bierut, for example, a Comintern official, along with representatives of the Moscow-based and Kremlin-controlled Union of Polish Patriots.

Caesar's Wife's Sins

Local Polish Home Army forces, as directed by the London government-in-exile, helped the Red Army's advance. But in most cases, once the Germans had sufficiently retreated, the Polish officers were arrested and their men impressed into the Soviet-commanded Polish Army. The liberated areas came under the control of the communist government installed in Lublin. In July, the Red Army neared the outskirts of Warsaw. On August 1, the Poles in the old capital rose up against the German occupiers—but Stalin's legions just across the Wisła (Vistula) River did not come to their assistance. The Warsaw Uprising, thus doomed, nevertheless lasted 63 days. Neither the uprising, nor its 150,000 victims, nor its lesson, would be forgotten.

By the time the "Big Three" met at Yalta in February 1945, the Lublin government was firmly entrenched in Warsaw. Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt were convinced that they

The Strike (1910). Stanisław Lentz completed this painting five years after Polish workers, in a nationwide general strike, sought a shorter workday and a democratic republic. The desire for both "bread and freedom" persists.



could do little, short of war with the Soviets, to change that reality. They went along with Stalin's designs for Poland, recognizing the Curzon Line as Poland's eastern boundary and thereby placing the cities of Wilno (Vilnius) and Lwów (L'vov), centers of Polish culture for centuries, inside the Soviet Union. (The Allies agreed to compensate Poland by making extensive annexations to the west at Germany's expense.) In addition, the communist government, rather than the London government-in-exile, was accepted by the Allied leaders as the nucleus of the future Polish regime, although, in an empty concession, Stalin promised to "reorganize" the Lublin government to include some "democratic leaders." Stalin promised, too, that "free and unfettered" elections would be held. They would be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. "I did not know Caesar's wife," Roosevelt told Stalin, "but she was believed to have been pure." Replied Stalin: "I was told so about Caesar's wife, but in fact she had certain sins."

The Western leaders' hopes were in vain. The postwar period of "dualism"—when the PPR, although effectively dominating the provisional government, kept a low profile, and when substantial personal freedom still existed in Poland—did not last very long. When elections were finally held in January 1947, they were not like Caesar's wife. Had they been, Mikołajczyk's

POLAND: A CHRONOLOGY, 1772-1982

1772 First Partition: Russia, Prussia, and Austria split up almost one-third of the "Noble Republic" of Poland-Lithuania among themselves.

1791 May 3 Constitution adopted. The Sejm (Parliament) is strengthened, and a hereditary monarchy supplants election of Polish kings by nobles.

1793 Second Partition: Prussia and Russia slice into Poland again, leaving a powerless "rump state."

1794 Opposing Second Partition, General Tadeusz Kościuszko, hero of American Revolution, leads doomed revolt.



Tadeusz
Kościuszko
(1746-1817)

1795 Third Partition: Russia, Austria, and Prussia at last eliminate Poland from the map.

1807 Napoleon rewards Poles after his victories over Austria, Russia, and Prussia by creating Duchy of Warsaw.

1815 Congress of Vienna establishes quasi-autonomous Kingdom of Poland, dominated by Russia.

1830 Uprising in Warsaw for Polish independence. It is crushed by Tsar Nicholas I the following year.

1863 Insurrection against tsarist rule. It is put down after 16 months, and the Congress Kingdom is abolished.

1882 Polish Socialist party (Proletariat) is formed in Warsaw, suppressed by tsarist police within four years.

1892 A second Polish Socialist Party is founded; supports creation of sovereign democratic republic.

1893 Rosa Luxemburg and others found revolutionary Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland (and Lithuania); favors close cooperation with Russian Socialists.



Rosa Luxemburg
(1871-1919)

1897 Roman Dmowski's National Democratic Party formed; seeks united and liberated Poland; is strongly anti-German.

1914 With outbreak of World War I, Dmowski lobbies in Russia (and later in London and Paris) for a Polish state; to the same end, Socialist Józef Piłsudski forms Polish Legion in Galicia with Austrian assistance and attempts invasion of Russian Poland.

1916 Central Powers proclaim formation of a Kingdom of Poland under protection of Austrian and German Emperors.

1917 Russian provisional government and rival Petrograd Soviet call for establishment of an independent Polish state.

1918 U.S. President Woodrow Wilson proclaims Fourteen Points, one of them calling for creation of Poland. Polish Socialists form provisional government and Piłsudski takes office as Commander in Chief and Chief of State. Polish Social Democrats and Polish Socialists-Left merge to form Communist Workers' Party of Poland.

1919 Elections to Constituent Assembly. Treaty of Versailles fixes Poland's western borders. Poland annexes western Ukraine. Polish-Soviet war begins.



Józef Piłsudski
(1867-1935)

1920 Piłsudski's forces defeat Red Army in Battle of Warsaw.

1921 Second Republic, dominated by Dmowski's National Democrats.

1926 Piłsudski seizes power in coup d'état; sets up Sanacja "cleanup" regime.

1935 Death of Piłsudski.

1938 Stalin dissolves Communist Party of Poland.

1939 Molotov-von Ribbentrop non-aggression pact. Nazis invade Poland (September 1), followed by the Soviets two weeks later. Polish government-in-exile, headed by Władysław Sikorski, established in Paris, later moved to London.

1941 Germany invades Soviet Union.

1942 Polish Workers' Party formed by communists. Hitler's "Final Solution" of "Jewish Problem" gets under way.

1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. For three weeks, the city's Jews forcibly resist deportation to death camps. Germans reveal Katyn massacre.

1944 Polish Communists establish Committee of National Liberation, recognized as temporary Polish government by Soviet Union. Warsaw Uprising.

1945 Soviets liberate Warsaw (January 17). A month later, Allied leaders meet at Yalta. Provisional Government of National Unity is formed by Communists and others and recognized by Western powers. Potsdam Conference (July 17-August 2).

1947 Communist-dominated "Democratic Bloc" wins rigged elections to Sejm.



Władysław
Gomułka
(1905-1982)

1948 Party boss Władysław Gomułka purged. Stalinist period begins under Bolesław Bierut. Polish United Workers' Party emerges from union of Communists and Socialists.

1952 Adoption of Soviet-style constitution marks formal advent of Polish People's Republic.

1956 Bierut dies in Moscow, succeeded

as First Secretary by Edward Ochab. Rioting by workers in Poznań. Gomułka, rehabilitated, becomes First Secretary. Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, Poland's primate, freed after three years in detention.

1968 Students riot in Warsaw and Kraków. Regime launches campaign against intellectuals and Jews. Polish armed forces take part in Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia (August 20).



Edward Gierek
(b. 1913)

1970 Bloody rioting by workers in Baltic shipyards of Szczecin, Gdynia, and Gdańsk. Gomułka replaced as First Secretary by Edward Gierek.

1971 Gierek starts effort to modernize economy and buy domestic peace with Western imports and credits.

1976 Economy sags. Workers riot.

1978 Kraków's Karol Cardinal Wojtyła is elected Pope John Paul II.

1979 Pope visits Poland as economic crisis worsens.

1980 Labor turmoil results in Gdańsk Agreement; Solidarity created. Gierek replaced by Stanisław Kania.

1981 General Wojciech Jaruzelski succeeds Kania as First Secretary. Jaruzelski on December 13 declares martial law.



Pope John Paul II
(b. 1920)

1982 Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa is released from detention after trade union is formally dissolved. Jaruzelski lifts "main rigors" of martial law, but does not release all detained activists. Pope announces plans for June 1983 visit.

Peasant Party, supported by most noncommunist forces in Poland, unquestionably would have won the largest number of seats in the Sejm. But thanks to terror and fraud—including mass arrests and raids on Mikołajczyk's headquarters throughout the country, as well as legal measures that struck his party's name from the ballot in about one-fifth of the election districts—the Peasant Party garnered only 28 seats out of 444.

Not surprisingly, the PPR and its Socialist and other allies in the "Democratic Bloc" emerged the winners. Before the year was out, Mikołajczyk himself, fearing that a price had been put on his head, fled to the West. In December 1948, the Polish Communists erased the last source of potential political opposition by effectively eliminating the Socialist Party—absorbing it into the PPR to form the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). At the Unification Congress in Warsaw, members of the assembly chanted over and over again: "Sta-lin, Sta-lin, Sta-lin." Poland as a state entered a new era. Poland as a people balked.

No 'Polish Way'

Over Poland, as over the rest of Eastern Europe, night descended. The Communist parties everywhere did their utmost to interrupt institutional continuity, erode popular morale, and erase the memory of national history. Relying on force, corruption, blackmail, harassment, and sheer exhaustion, the Communists sought submission if not energetic support. Those in the parties' ranks who expressed misgivings about following Moscow's lead or adopting its economic model or embracing its ideas about cultural policy were accused of "nationalist deviation" and purged. In Poland, Władysław Gomułka, who had often spoken of the need to take "the Polish way to Socialism," did not hold his party post as General Secretary for long. He was, in fact, arrested and imprisoned for three years. Stalin's man Bierut took his place.

Outwardly, events in Poland resembled those taking place in its Eastern European neighbors. The Poles first heard of their refusal to accept Marshall Plan aid on Radio Moscow, just as Czech Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk learned of his nation's rejection from Stalin himself. Poland's leaders, like the leaders of other Eastern European states, paid obeisance to Cominform, the Communist Information Bureau, Comintern's successor. But, inwardly, the Polish situation was different. The Polish Communist party never managed to subdue the populace. Indeed, it has never ceased capitulating to the people whom it wanted to rule unconditionally. Four times in 25 years—in 1956,

1970, 1976, and 1980—it faced a national revolt, and each time, whether armed force was employed or not, it was compelled to give in.

The history of the rest of Eastern Europe has not, of course, been uneventful. Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia did, to various extents, break with Moscow, but the power of each nation's ruling Communist party was never effectively challenged. The Hungarian revolt in 1956 and the Czechoslovakian "spring" in 1968 both prompted Soviet intervention, but that was followed in each case by a quick return to normal (which meant that rulers and ruled led parallel lives in an atmosphere, insofar as possible, of mutual indifference).

Rejecting the Graft

But in Poland, there has never been a return to "normal." The perverse cycle is by now familiar. It begins with the mismanaged economy functioning more eccentrically than usual. Then comes a spark, in the form of some ill-considered government decision (e.g., abruptly raising the price of basic foods). The resulting explosion fragments the party apparatus. Attempts to contain the conflagration, usually by force (54 people were killed at Poznań in 1956, more than 100 at Gdańsk in 1970), merely cause it to spread. Finally the party resorts to radical surgery, sacrificing its top leadership, promising reform, and finally, when all is calm, sliding back into its old rut.

Clearly, then, a question needs to be asked: What makes Poland so different? Why has the communist "graft" been repeatedly rejected as it has not been elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc?

The most fundamental reason, as I proposed above, is that the Polish Communist party has historically been unable to comprehend the nature of the Polish nation or to accept that the nation's basic characteristics are, indeed, basic, unalterable, inherent. With 30 million people in 1945 and a land area of 120,700 square miles, Poland was the largest country to come under Soviet sway. It could boast a cultural coherence unrivaled in Eastern Europe. Its people spoke a single language, and its key institutions—the Parliament, the universities, the church, the trade unions—had long histories: decades in the case of unions, centuries in the case of the Parliament, a millennium in the case of the church. To succeed in Sovietizing Poland, the Communist regime had to root out and overcome these impediments. It had, in short, to overcome Poland itself.

Nor, from the Communist point of view, were the circumstances after 1945 ideal. Poland had suffered greatly as a result

of World War II. It had lost one-sixth of its population—six million people, including three million Jews—and endured the nightmare of Nazi and Soviet occupation. But Poland had also greatly contributed to Allied victory. Poles fought at Arnheim and Monte Cassino and Lenino and, altogether, constituted the fourth largest Allied armed force, surpassed only by those of the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain. At war's end, the Poles who survived felt far more acutely than did the Czechs or Austrians or Hungarians that they had earned a right, ratified in blood, to shape their own destiny. The prospect of slipping permanently into a Soviet "sphere of influence" was abhorrent. It had been only a few years, after all, since the Russians had participated in Poland's partition, brutally thinned its population, and cavalierly murdered a generation of its military officers. Even before all this, the Russians had not been regarded by the Poles with bonhomie.

It was inevitable, then, that attempts by the Polish regime to Sovietize the country and siphon away its character would at best antagonize and at worst antagonize and fail. But the Communist leaders had no choice but to push ahead. They were, themselves, being pushed.

Against the Grain

The regime promptly abolished the respected position of President of the Republic and in 1952 gave Poland a new socialist constitution that hollowly saluted "the fraternal bond with the USSR." National Constitution Day (May 3), the anniversary of the adoption of Poland's 1791 Constitution, the earliest democratic charter in Europe, was eliminated. The PZPR also proposed changing the Polish national anthem, Józef Wybicki's "Mazurka," which dated back to the period of the partitions. Even Stalin thought that was going too far and overruled it.

The success of such tactics is perhaps best judged by the fact that in 1981, taking advantage of the relative freedom of the 16-month Solidarity period, throngs of young people spontaneously celebrated the old "national day" of May 3, whose significance is not something learned in Polish schools. As we shall see, the events of the Solidarity period provided a window into a Polish consciousness unadulterated by the regime.

The Polish Army had always been irrationally precious in Polish eyes. The Warsaw government overlooked that. The Home Army, whose performance against the Nazis was a source of vast pride to all Poles, was reviled on posters as the "spit-soiled dwarf of the reactionaries." Polish citizenship was taken

away from those who had commanded Polish forces in the West, and several high-ranking officers were condemned to death upon their return to Poland. The oath of allegiance was altered so that Polish soldiers swore loyalty not just to Poland but also to the Soviet Union. The regime accepted a Soviet Marshal, Konstanty Rokossowski, as Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army, Minister of Defense, and member of the Politburo. (On his new Polish uniform, Rokossowski wore the prestigious *Virtuti Militari* medal, pinning it, however, on the wrong side of his breast.) Soviet officers of Polish extraction were brought in to man sensitive posts, and a Soviet general, Seraphim Lalin, was put in control of Poland's secret police.

Politicized Learning

It is worth noting that workers in Warsaw in 1980 named a bridge after General Stefan Grot-Rowecki, the Home Army Commander, and proposed turning the home of Marshal Józef Piłsudski in nearby Sulejówek into a national museum. The names of these generals do not reverently cross Polish teachers' lips. A year later, in August 1981, a heavy cement monument appeared at the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. It consisted of a cross and a tombstone on which had been engraved a simple but resonant message: "Katyn—1940." The next morning, the monument had disappeared. Significantly, the Polish people had built the monument in broad daylight; the government had to remove it in the dead of night. Needless to say, Katyn as a Soviet atrocity is not in the textbooks either.

Nor is the best of Polish literature, past and present. Literature has long been Poland's conscience, but the regime from the outset tried to impose its own standards of style (a crude socialist realism) and, above all, of content while suppressing traditional classics along with the work of contemporary Polish writers. Polish censors (who would have found themselves aptly described by Orwell and Kafka, had their books been available in postwar Poland) spent their days compiling blacklists of books, movies, and plays. In 1968, the Polish authorities even removed *Dziady* ("Forefather's Eve"), by Adam Mickiewicz, from the Warsaw stage. *Dziady*, the most patriotic play in all of Polish literature, with the status of a national epic, was written in the 19th century when Warsaw was under Tsarist occupation. The regime felt obliged to shut the performance down, so up-to-date and anti-Soviet did it sound.

The effect of censorship was not, however, the end of Polish literature so much as the end of Polish literature published le-



Source: M. K. Dziewanowski, *Poland in the Twentieth Century*, 1977; Konrad Syrop, *Poland: Between the Hammer and the Anvil*, 1968.

To compensate for the postwar loss of its eastern half (mostly poor farmland) to the USSR, Poland won from Germany important industrial and coal-producing areas, including Upper Silesia, as well as greater access to the sea.

gally in Poland. The truly creative artists such as novelist Witold Gombrowicz and playwright Sławomir Mrożek continued to publish their work abroad. Inevitably, it filtered back and circulated widely in Poland. The regime, of course, has attempted to slay by silence the activities of *Kultura*, the émigré monthly and publishing house in Paris that has helped to keep alive everything the Warsaw government hoped to annihilate. Scores of Polish writers working in the West—including Czesław Miłosz, author of the powerful anticommunist critique, *The Captive Mind*—do not, as writers, officially exist. Yet when Miłosz was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1980, the Polish people expressed such pride in the work of this man of whom they were not supposed to have heard that the regime was forced to allow

him a triumphal visit to his native land. Poland's best writers were among the founders, in 1976, of KOR (the Committee of Workers' Defense), which helped provide the intellectual foundation of the free trade-union movement.

Independent learning, like the creative impulse, was an early target of the Communist government. For 500 years, Polish intellectuals had been at the forefront of European thinking. The University of Kraków, founded in 1364, is one of central Europe's oldest. But in 1951, the regime replaced the venerable Polish Academy of Knowledge with a crude, Soviet-style Academy of Sciences. The government politicized learning and flooded the universities with a vulgar Stalinist Marxism. A number of university posts went to party hacks, and party leaders, infused with a new snobbism, obliged universities to provide them with academic degrees of dubious merit.

Fighting for Souls

The corruption of the university, however, was far from total. Much of the professoriat maintained its integrity. In 1968–69, the regime was obliged to purge hundreds of eminent academics from their posts, including the economist Włodzimierz Brus and philosopher Leszek Kołakowski. Scholars continued nevertheless to agitate for liberalization in Poland. Their efforts supplemented those of the literary men who founded the KOR. Scholars from almost every conceivable field were instrumental in creating the "Flying University" which organized lectures around the country that would never have been permitted in the regular university seminar room—a recapitulation of the Warsaw Uprising, for example, or a revisionist assessment of contemporary Polish history, or a critique of the regime's economic policy, or a cold look at Poland's relations with the USSR. The durability of intellectual life in Poland is perhaps best attested to by the number of scholars the regime sees fit to expel year after year.

Of all the institutions the Warsaw government attempted to suborn, the most important was the Catholic Church. The church has long served as the main and practically invulnerable stronghold of the Polish national identity. Conservative, traditional, and often intolerant, the church nevertheless had always been *Polish*, a quality of particular importance during periods of war or occupation. The Communist apparatus lost no other battle more decisively than it did its contest with the church for the soul of the Poles.

The Communists' original sin, so to speak, was the creation

in 1949 of the association PAX, a lay organization designed to “liberate” the populace from the church hierarchy. Under the leadership of Bolesław Piasecki (the prewar chief of Falanga, a Polish fascist organization), PAX expanded quickly, providing the government with an unpersuasive alibi whenever the regime wished to defy the official church hierarchy. PAX was at the Communists’ side when they shut down important Catholic publications like *Tygodnik Powszechny*; it helped organize the “patriot-priest” movement; and it assisted the government in its anti-Semitic campaign of the late 1960s.

‘Revolutionary Vigilance’

It must be granted that the regime tried its best to humble the church. It put Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek on trial in 1953, accusing him of “spying for the CIA,” arrested nine other bishops that year for sedition, and “isolated”—confining him to a convent—Poland’s Primate, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński. Party leader Bierut and others personally went to Moscow to coordinate an indictment against the Primate, and it was only at Moscow’s insistence that the Warsaw government did not actually put Wyszyński on trial. Meanwhile, the regime pressed a Soviet-style propaganda campaign, banning religion from the schools, taking steps to curb the training of priests, and creating museums, associations, and publications devoted to atheism. If only on cultural grounds, such actions were a slap in the face of the Polish people.

The results of the regime’s campaign against the church, predictably, were abysmal. Ostracized by local congregations, the patriot-priest movement fizzled. Catholic publications continued to appear underground and eventually were given official sanction. And after the workers’ upheaval at Poznań in 1956, the new First Secretary, Gomułka, freed Cardinal Wyszyński as a sop to public opinion. Since then, the first act of every new First Secretary has been to meet publicly with Poland’s Primate—as if to ask permission to form a government.

The election of Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, Archbishop of Kraków, to the papacy in 1978 further fortified Poland’s church. Pope John Paul II’s 1979 visit to his homeland may have marked a turning point in the country’s modern history by giving millions of Poles for the first time a sense of their own power. One year later, in August 1980, Solidarity was born. The relative position of the church and the regime in Poland was nicely summed up by a Polish cartoon that appeared in 1979. It shows the Pope celebrating mass in Warsaw’s Victory Square, looking

over a sea of heads. A party boss, standing behind the altar, points to the crowd of believers and orders a policeman: "Take down their names."

Unable to come to terms with the nation it had to govern, the Polish Communist party could wield power only by the continual reinforcement of "revolutionary vigilance"—the reinforcement, that is, of the apparatus of repression.

The party has never been monolithic. Its leadership, consisting not of ideologues but of adept individuals driven by the exercise of power, has remained distinct from its base, consisting of petty opportunists and even a few idealists. Over the years, the base of the party, periodically decimated by purges directed from on high, has proved to be anything but stable. Between 1959 and 1970, some 500,000 party members were expelled for "ideological apathy," 82 percent of them workers and peasants. It was a deliberate "de-proletarianization" of the party. The intellectuals came next, 8,000 of them, tainted by "revisionism," expelled in 1968. Who remained? The apparatus, the *nomenklatura*. Yet even the *nomenklatura* was not immune to factional infighting. During the 1940s, the "Soviets" were pitted against the "nationalists"; during the 1950s, the "dogmatists" against the "revisionists"; during the 1960s, the "veterans" against the "zionists"; and during the 1970s, the "technocrats" against the "regionalists."

Stalin Was Right

Blinded by their internecine disputes, and more interested in retaining their hold on the instruments of power than in employing them effectively, the leadership of the Communist party always studiously ignored the danger signals.

A year after taking power, in 1956, Gomułka crippled the economic advisory council when Oskar Lange and Michael Kalecki were devising workable solutions to Poland's economic crisis. In 1965, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski went to prison for their "Open Letter to the Party," which criticized the regime's stifling bureaucratization. During the 1970s, Edward Gierek, surrounded by his technocrats, spurned the four reports of the "experience and future" group, which warned of imminent social and economic chaos. Deaf to all alarms, the party leaders knew nothing of the mess they had created until the wave of strikes along the coast in 1980. By then it was too late.

The extent of the isolation of Poland's leaders from the rest of the Polish people is hard to overstate. In 1965, Gomułka, speaking on TV to a nation beset by shortages of food, clothing,

and consumer goods, scoffed at the notion that women could not find tights to buy because "my wife just bought some" (at a state store for the elite). Gierek, according to an official party report, did not learn until 1978 of the massive increase of the Polish debt that had been building for years. Living in a small world of their own creation, the party leaders fought among themselves, jockeyed for influence, and by all accounts lined their pockets. After Gierek's fall from power in 1980, an official investigation showed that he, along with two Prime Ministers, seven Vice-Prime Ministers, 18 Ministers, and scores of Vice-Ministers, had used government money to build private villas for themselves.

Deep down, I suspect, Polish party leaders perceived the hollowness of their enterprise. The cynicism of Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz was legendary. Jan Pietrzak, for many years the manager of a satirical theater in Warsaw, once told him that they both had made a career out of running funny institutions. Cyrankiewicz replied, "Yes, but you have better results." Conscious of the lack of trust, party leaders have periodically sought empty legitimation in elections that they control. But what comfort, really, can they take from a pro forma 99 percent approval at the polls compared to the unofficial plebiscites represented by the strikes in 1970 and 1980, or by the welcome accorded the pope on his visit in 1979?

In the end, the party leaders had to resort to threats, as Gierek did in 1980 when he spoke of "the anxiety of our Soviet comrades." And when threats failed, there was only force.

By December 1981, after more than a year of social, political, and cultural ferment made possible by the emergence of Solidarity, the Communist party had nothing else to fall back on. A military man, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, had been Prime Minister since February, First Secretary since October. On the night of December 13, he became chairman of the Wron, the military council of national salvation. Martial law was declared. Bertolt Brecht, who knew the system well, once said that when a communist government lost the confidence of its people, it was the people who had to be dismissed. But in Poland, that was not possible; it had been tried and had never worked. Ultimately, the Army dismissed the party.

The events of the past 35 years make one conclusion inescapable. In August 1944, Joseph Stalin received Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the Polish Prime Minister, in the Kremlin. Responding to Mikołajczyk's doubts as to the future of democracy in Poland, Stalin said: "Communism does not fit the Poles. They are too individualistic, too nationalistic. . . ."

This time, Stalin was right.