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THE MASS PROTESTS IN PEOPLE'S POLAND
— A CONTINUOUS PROCESS OR SINGLE EVENTS?

Research on what is known as the “Polish months” — June and October 1956, March 1968, December 1970, June 1976 and finally August 1980 and December 1981 — has been conducted for over ten years. The problem of relations between the USSR and its “protectorates”, or “marks of the Empire” to use Edgar Morin’s term, has not yet been fathomed, even though it is of fundamental importance for the whole history of the Polish People’s Republic. But apart from this question, what we already know about the years 1955–1957, a period of the growth and suppression of the aspirations for freedom, is enough to try to explain the place of the year 1956 in Poland’s history and in the post-war international and internal system¹. Research on the subsequent clashes between the mutinous society (or its specific segments) and the communist authorities is less advanced. The

¹ Cf. M. Tarniewski (J. Karpiński), *Porcja wolności (A Dose of Freedom)*, Paryż 1979; Z. Rykowski, W. Władyka, *Polska próba. Październik '56 (The Polish Attempt. October 1956)*, Kraków 1989; *Wydarzenia czerwcowe w Poznaniu 1956. Materiały z konferencji naukowej zorganizowanej przez Instytut Historii UAM w dniu 4 czerwca 1981 (The June 1956 Events in Poznań. Materials from a conference organised by the Institute of History of the Adam Mickiewicz University on June 4, 1981)*, Poznań 1981; *Poznański czerwiec 1956 (June 1956 in Poznań)*, ed. J. Maciejewski, Z. Trjanowiczowa, Poznań 1981; S. Jankowiak, E. Makowski, *Poznański czerwiec 1956 w dokumentach (Documents concerning June 1956 in Poznań)*, Poznań 1995; P. Machciewicz, *Polski rok 1956 (The Polish Year 1956)*, Warszawa 1993; M. Kula, *Paryż, Londyn i Waszyngton patrzą na Październik 1956 w Polsce (Paris, London and Washington Watch October 1956 in Poland)*, Warszawa 1992; *Materiały konferencji naukowej o 1956 r. zorganizowanej przez Instytut Historii PAN, Polskie Towarzystwo Historyczne i Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN w Warszawie w dn. 21–22 października 1996 r. (Materials from a conference on 1956 organised in Warsaw on October 21 and 22, 1996 by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Polish Historical Society and the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences)*, “Polska 1944 / 1945–1989”, vol. 3, Warszawa 1997.

most exhaustive monograph devoted to March 1968² was written at the end of the 1980s when its author, Jerzy Eisler, had no access to archives and when the assembling of accounts was difficult. Several volumes of documents, accounts³ and studies have been devoted to the December strikes on the seacoast and their brutal pacification, but those contributed by authors outside the ruling circles, such as Jakub Karpiński and Andrzej Friszke⁴, are based on incomplete sources, while those by authors from the ruling circles (Mieczysław F. Rakowski) present the point of view of the party establishment⁵. A study has also been published on the stance of the army in December 1970⁶. It can be assumed with some reservations that the course of events has been reconstructed, but we still do not know all the mechanisms, that is, the decision-making processes on various levels, the responsibility of individual persons, the role of conflicts within the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), and Moscow's direct and indirect influence on the decisions. There are no studies on the attitude and behaviour of various social groups on the seacoast and in other regions of the country, nor do we know much about the motivation of the participants in the strikes and disturbances.

Subsequent disturbances, those in Radom and several other Polish towns in June 1976, have not yet been researched; scholars are having difficulties even in reconstructing the course of events. The literature dealing with the year 1980, the foundation and development of "Solidarity", is undoubtedly richer, to mention only Jerzy Holzer's pioneering work⁷.

² J. Eisler, *Marzec 1968. Geneza. Przebieg. Konsekwencje (March 1968. Its Genesis, Course and Consequences)*, Warszawa 1991.

³ For instance, a volume of documents and accounts *Grudzień 1970 (December 1970)*, Paryż 1986; M. Szejnert, T. Zalewski, *Szczecin: Grudzień–Stierpień–Grudzień (Szczecin: December–August–December)*, Londyn 1986; *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego (Secret Documents of the Political Bureau)*, vol. 1, *Grudzień 1970 (December 1970)*, ed. P. Domański, Londyn 1991.

⁴ M. Tarniewski, (J. Karpiński), *Płonie komitet. Grudzień 1970 – Czerwiec 1976 (The Building of the Committee is on Fire, December 1970 – June 1976)*, Paryż 1982; Z. Korybutowicz (A. Friszke), *Grudzień 1970 (December 1970)*, Paryż 1986.

⁵ M. F. Rakowski, *Przesilenie grudniowe. Przyczynek do dziejów najnowszych (The December Crisis. A Study in Recent History)*, Warszawa 1981.

⁶ E. J. Nalepa, *Wojsko Polskie w grudniu 1970 (The Polish Army in December 1970)*, Warszawa 1990.

⁷ J. Holzer, *Solidarność 1980–1981. Geneza i historia (Solidarity 1980–1981. Its Genesis and History)*, Warszawa 1984.

Such being the situation, one can have doubts whether it is possible to attempt to write a comprehensive study that would be more than a mere analysis, description and interpretation of concrete phenomena set in a temporal context. As regards 1956, this context consisted of the processes which were taking place on the global scale, within the Soviet bloc and in Poland after the death of Stalin. The clash between various formations within the *PZPR*, the victory of the adherents of democratisation in Czechoslovakia, and the spirit of revolt which spread to student circles on both sides of the Atlantic, in America and Europe, were the background of the March 1968 events. The December 1970 protest, its suppression, the fall of Władysław Gomułka and the accession of Edward Gierek's Silesian coterie to key positions in the system of power coincided with a successive phase of détente in East–West relations, first and foremost with the opening to the East started by Willy Brandt in the hope that this would gradually lower the barrier separating the two Europes along the Elbe and widen the scope of independence in the states subordinated to the USSR. The great success achieved by Gomułka on December 7, 1970, the signing of the treaty in which the Federal Republic of Germany recognised the Oder–Western Neisse frontier, preceded his retreat from power by two weeks.

It seems obvious that the disturbances in 1976, and in particular the great strikes held in July and August 1980 and the birth of "Solidarity", were closely connected with the international situation. Paradoxically, the détente and the consequent Helsinki treaty of August 1, 1975 which stabilised the existing frontiers in Europe, as well as the turn towards a new phase of the cold war in the second half of the seventies accelerated the destruction of the system. The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) — an indubitable success of Moscow, even though the Soviet Union did not succeed in torpedoing the provisions concerning human rights and civil liberties — created international standards recognised by the USSR and opened a plane of struggle to opposition movements. Henry Kissinger writes: "As it turned out, heroic reformers in Eastern Europe used Basket III as a rallying point in their fights to free their countries from Soviet domination. Both Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and Lech Walesa in Poland earned their place in the pantheon of freedom fighters by using these provisions, both

domestically and internationally, to undermine not only Soviet domination but the communist regimes in their own countries”⁸.

The Soviet leaders were caught in a sort of trap: what they regarded as a piece of paper became an effective weapon of movements fighting for freedom. It was the same with economic consequences, with credits and goods exchange. According to Adam Ułam: “Still, between 1972 and 1979 the Kremlin could view the overall picture of West–East economic relations with smugness: capitalist credits and technology were succouring the Soviet economy and even more so those of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, etc.”⁹

But in the middle of the decade the first symptoms of a deep structural crisis could be noticed in all countries of real socialism; the inefficiency of a centrally–steered economy became increasingly obvious in contacts with the West. However, under the presidency of Jimmy Carter the United States began to retreat from the policy of recognising “hard realities”, which inspired the administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford and which lay at the root of the declaration signed by Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev in 1972, the CSCE and the talks on limitation of strategic arms (SALT)¹⁰. The years when a democratic opposition was being organised in Poland saw the end of détente and the growth of a new cold war which the Soviets finally lost. The change which took place in the policy of the West, especially of America, overlapped the effects of détente and this spelled mortal danger to systems of the totalitarian type.

By using documents kept in archives, especially American and Russian ones, future researchers will be able to define more precisely to what extent events on the world scene and in the USSR influenced the resistance in Poland and the ruling party’s policy towards contestations, strikes, protests, demonstrations and disturbances. It will be possible to ascertain whether from the international perspective the successive mass demonstrations can be viewed as a certain whole built into the conflicts of

⁸ H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York 1994, p. 759.

⁹ A. Ułam, *The Dangerous Relation. Soviet Union in World Politics 1970–1982*, New York–Oxford 1983, p. 94.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*. Cf. also J. F. Petras, M. H. Morley, *The New Cold War: Reagan’s Policy toward Europe and the Third World*, in: *Capitalist and Socialist Crises in the Late Twentieth Century*, s.l., s.a., pp. 9 ff.

the divided Europe and of the bipolar system. But on the basis of accessible sources and scholarly literature it is worth even now to attempt to systematise our knowledge of these five chapters of Poland's history and decide whether these were single social outbursts caused mainly by the authorities' economic measures or a chain of events having a common foundation, namely, an immanent, overt or covert conflict between the aspirations of Polish society and the reality in the Polish People's Republic (PRL).

The Poles' adaptation to the existing conditions after the crushing defeat of legal opposition and of armed and civilian conspiracy in 1945–1948 and their resignation to their fate in face of internal and external realities, that is, the monopoly of communist power and the domination of the USSR, did not mean that all forms of resistance were given up. The mass reprisals which accompanied the seizure of power, the suppression of not only armed and political conspiracy but also of legal opposition, the terror in the years 1949–1955, the apogee of Stalinism, were the reasons why active resistance gave place to covert insubordination, to an inner defiance of the authorities' omnipotence and Sovietisation, to a struggle against the authorities' attempts to subjugate minds and souls, to a defence of the values engraved on the Polish cultural tissue, in particular national and religious values. After 1956, when the system became less repressive, adaptation increased, but this "little stability" did not signify satisfaction with fate or stupor and demoralisation, as some intellectuals then asserted. It is enough to recall Tadeusz Różewicz's poem *Our Little Stability* or Stefan Kisielewski's *Diaries*. In *Black Polonaise* Kazimierz Wierzyński wrote: "We shall become acclimatised, We shall manage to get food supplies, We shall get old, We shall get used, We shall reconcile ourselves to this ... Little Stabilisation / Great capitulation / Acclimatisation / Right. Right / Laughter"¹¹. On the contrary, as early as 1961 Władysław Bieńkowski pointed out in a treatise sent to Władysław Gomułka that the hopes awakened in 1956 were dying out and society was more and more doubtful about the ability of "the people in power to overcome the many anomalies of our life effectively, to find a way out of economic difficulties and use the economic and social forces of

¹¹ K. Wierzyński, *Czarny Polonez (Black Polonaise)*, Paryż 1968.

the country to secure development". Bieńkowski emphasised that dissatisfaction was strongest among workers¹². The potential of insubordination remained intact in various social strata, if it did not increase gradually. The authorities' brutality in suppressing all manifestations of protest (it is enough to recall the treatment of demonstrators after the liquidation of "Po prostu" in 1957), combined with political and socio-technical manoeuvres, as well as the limited, inconsistent and frequently only temporary concessions to the economic, cultural, religious and national aspirations of the ruled, were effective only in the short run. As a result, cyclic explosions of mass protests, defined by the party bodies and historians as "crises"¹³ are inscribed in the history of the Polish People's Republic.

These rebellions were the culmination of a resistance which in the intermediate periods manifested itself in various forms. An important role was undoubtedly played by the Church, to mention only the manifestation of several hundred thousand people on Jasna Góra in 1956, pilgrimages, altercations with the authorities over the construction of churches, the Church celebrations of the millenium of Poland's baptism in 1966, combined with the peregrinations of the picture of the Holy Virgin of Częstochowa across Poland, celebrations which, according to Jerzy Eisler, were "for the Catholics ... the greatest manifestation of their attitudes, convictions and faith before Pope John Paul II's visit in June 1979"¹⁴. In January 1974 Primate Stefan Wyszyński delivered a cycle of sermons in the Holy Cross church in Warsaw in which he criticised the state's omnipotence and emphasised man's right to a life on a proper level, to liberty and freedom of association. In one of these sermons he said: "The greater the respect for civil rights, the more redundant will the climate of intimidation be and the more quickly will it be possible to restrict the fantastically expanded security apparatus which is a genuine threat to many citizens". Opposition was also growing in scientific, literary and student circles. In 1964, 34 leading intellectuals sent a letter to Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz in which they demanded a change in cultural policy "in the spirit of the rights

¹² W. Bieńkowski, *Socjologia klęski (Sociology of Defeat)*, Paryż 1971.

¹³ Cf. J. Holzer, *Doświadczenia Marca 68 (Experiences of March 1968)*, "Kierunki", May 17, 1981.

¹⁴ J. Eisler, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

guaranteed by the Constitution of the Polish state and consistent with the good of the nation". The year 1975 was marked by protests organised in connection with the announcement that the state's socialist character, unbreakable ties with the USSR and the leading role of the PZPR would be inscribed in the Constitution and that the extent of civil rights would depend on fulfilment of civic duties. The next year witnessed the establishment of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR), the first overtly acting organisation; it was victimised and not legalised by the state but was not crushed by arrests. A secret publishing movement developed. The Society for Academic Courses started its activity. Oppositional groups and currents inspired by different traditions and ideologies crystallised in various social milieux. The Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia and Pastoral Services for Students developed legal activity.

Before I pass on to a comparative analysis of successive violent mass demonstrations, let me say a few words about the language. Such euphemistic expressions as (Poznań, December) "incidents", (March, December, Radom) "events" and the turning point (of October and December) predominated not only in the PRL's historiography, to say nothing of propaganda, but also in oppositional circles. Jan Józef Lipski wrote about March and Radom "events" in his history of KOR¹⁵. Symbolic names, such as June '56, October '56, March '68, December '70, August '80, were also used. Some historians tried to introduce terms which defined the character of these events. Wojciech Roszkowski wrote about Poznań workers' rebellion in his *Poland's Recent History*¹⁶; in his introduction to a volume of documents concerning the 1956 events in Poznań, Edward Makowski called them a rebellion of Poznań inhabitants, "a result of growing dissatisfaction with the living and political conditions during the Stalinist period"¹⁷. Paweł Machcewicz viewed the economic protest in Poznań as a political and national rebellion¹⁸. For Jan Żaryn the Poznań riots were a kind of national uprising be-

¹⁵ J. J. Lipski, *Komitet Obrony Robotników KOR. Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej (The Workers' Defence Committee KOR. The Social Self-Defence Committee)*, Londyn 1983, pp. 17, 30.

¹⁶ A. Albert (W. Roszkowski), *Najnowsza Historia Polski (Poland's Recent History)*, Warszawa 1983.

¹⁷ *Poznański czerwiec 1956*, p. 5.

¹⁸ P. Machcewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

cause of their insurrectionary atmosphere, the seizure of weapons and their use. Zbysław Rykowski and Wiesław Władyka¹⁹ also wrote about an “insurrectionary atmosphere” and “the tragedy of fratricidal fighting”. As regards March 1968, Jerzy Eisler stresses in his monograph that the term “March events” is a euphemism but he failed to replace it by another term. But the strikes and riots on the seacoast in 1970 should, in his opinion, be regarded as a national uprising. “There have been few attempts to reply to the question what we were then faced with”, he writes. “Was this a rebellion of desperate people or a workers’ revolt or an event of an insurrectionary character which should be called an uprising for it was permeated not only with social but also political and even national ideas and substance. I myself am more and more inclined to speak of the December Uprising of 1970, although I realise that compared with the November Uprising, the January Uprising and in particular the Warsaw Uprising, this term may be contested by some people”²⁰. Such being his attitude, he uses the expression the December uprising in his *Outline of Poland’s Political History*²¹. However, he is the only one to use this expression. For Andrzej Paczkowski this was “a workers’ revolt”, just as the events in Poznań in June 1956 were “a revolt of the workers and inhabitants of Poznań”²². Rebellion, revolt, disturbances, riots, national uprising and self-limited revolution combined with a national uprising in 1980–1981: such are the terms which were used when these events were taking place which have appeared in scientific and publicistic literature to define their character; their common denominator is a violent collective manifestation of active protest which unchangeably led to brutal reprisals by the communist authorities and to the overthrow of the ruling team in 1956, 1970 and 1980.

The basic question which comes to mind when one interprets these collective eruptions of mass rioting concern their driving force. Which social groups were involved in them? What role did

¹⁹ Z. Rykowski, W. Władyka, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

²⁰ E. J. Nalepa, *op. cit.*, *Foreword*, pp. 5–6.

²¹ J. Eisler, *Zarys dziejów politycznych Polski 1944–1989 (An Outline of Poland’s Political History 1944–1989)*, Warszawa 1992.

²² A. Paczkowski, *Pół wieku dziejów Polski 1939–1989 (Half a Century of Poland’s History 1939–1989)*, Warszawa 1995.

they play? This is closely connected with the question of reasons for these protests, direct and indirect reasons hidden under the surface of public life. This is a fundamental question for it concerns the essence of these rebellions: did they express dissatisfaction with the living conditions or were they an expression of their participants' much deeper, more intricate and frequently subconscious feelings that their aspirations had not been met and that their fundamental national, religious and cultural values were endangered. The reaction of the authorities and the influence which these violent disturbances had on the functioning of the system and on the way of wielding power are a separate problem.

It is a truism that workers employed in big enterprises and the intelligentsia, above all its two segments, that is, students and the intellectual élite, played a leading role in all these forms of collective protest. These two groups underwent considerable transformations already in the first decade of People's Poland but they did not lose their ethos. The tradition of struggle for social justice, for equitable work conditions and fair wages survived among workers. Jarosław Maciejewski pointed out that in Poznań in June 1956 "The slogans inscribed on banners and painted on walls proclaimed demands as old as the proletariat itself"²³. The same can be said about December 1970 and June 1976. The struggle never came to an end. Strikes were of a mass character in the first years, in 1946 they embraced several hundred enterprises; they abated after 1947, but workers laid down tools also in the fifties. Jacek Leoński who analysed workers' autobiographies sent in for a competition in 1981 points out that they reflected the dilemmas of many diarists, especially as regards their presentation of the years 1949–1956²⁴. A part of the intelligentsia, irrespective of its members' ideology and despite the inflow of many *homines novi*, did not lose its traditional values and its aspiration to spiritual leadership. The tradition of the war-time resistance movement and insurrectionary fights seems to have played a lesser role, though its traces can be found in June 1956, December 1970 and June 1976.

²³ Poznański czerwiec 1956, p. 7.

²⁴ J. Leoński, *Drogi życiowe i świadomość społeczna robotników polskich (The Polish Workers' Conditions of Life and Their Social Consciousness)*, Warszawa 1987, pp. 163 ff.

The generational factor should also be taken into account when we speak of the driving force. The most active in 1956, 1970, 1980, not to speak of 1968, were young people. "Among the people active in the strike committees (in 1970 — K. K.) were persons aged from 25 to 35, that age group", said Bogdan Borusewicz. "But those who headed the processions, who set the tone of the demonstrations, were younger, between the age of 18 and 22"²⁵. At a sitting of the Political Bureau on December 19, 1970, Zenon Kliszko emphasised that young workers had not only predominated in the crowd which attacked the Voievodship Committee in Gdańsk but "constituted the core of the strike"²⁶. More than 72 per cent of the persons arrested in Gdańsk and Szczecin were below the age of 25²⁷. To a large extent this was a result of the youth's natural tendency to revolt, to disagree with the surrounding world. Moreover, the young people who were reaching maturity had not experienced the disappointments and defeats of the previous generations, were not paralysed by fear, did not succumb to the fatalistic philosophy of adaptation. Writing in his diary about "the rebellion of the young" in 1968, K i s i e l e w s k i, one of the founders of the neopositivist orientation, convinced that Poland was doomed to communism if not for ever then for whole decades, complained: "The young irritate me by nonchalant ignorance of the recent past, but this is probably the source of their strength. Strength is something that goes beyond the hitherto existing categories, something that takes one by surprise, that amazes and irritates one, but it does exist"²⁸. In another place, referring to the "March rebellion of the youth", he prophesises: "A new rebellion will come anyhow; it will be staged by young engineers, for how long can educated people be ruled by party wrigglers?"²⁹ The generation born and brought up under the communist system, a generation which did not know freedom and democracy and had been taught not to think and act in the categories of ideology and politics, was only seemingly satisfied

²⁵ *Grudzień 1970*, p. 565.

²⁶ *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 1, p. 95, meeting held on December 19, 1970.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

²⁸ S. K i s i e l e w s k i, *Dzienniki (Diaries)*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 18–19, note of June 9, 1968.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 31, note of June 18, 1968.

with what the system offered in the material and spiritual fields. This is why these roughly speaking ten-year intervals in the cycle of mass protests should be attributed not only to the international and internal situation in 1956, 1968/70, 1976 and 1980 but also to generational changes.

The traumatic defeat of the Warsaw Uprising (1944) the shock of Yalta, despondency and the loss of all hope were not engraved on the memory of young workers and students in 1956. The shipyard workers in 1970 did not remember pre-war poverty and post-war advancement; the fact that economic conditions had improved compared with the years of the Six Year Plan was not enough for them. Jacek Le oń s k i says in his analysis that it was the youngest generation of workers that had the most negative view of reality. It was not enough for students in 1968 that the repressiveness of the system was decreasing, that totalitarianism, which after all never prevailed in Poland, was slowly turning into a bureaucratic dictatorship of the communist party, a dictatorship which though it preserved the ideological ritual, was more and more wanting in content; it was not enough for them that an end had been put to attempts to make Poland uniform with the USSR and that the *PZPR* had returned to the national dress of its predecessor, the Polish Workers' Party, that the demolition of the Catholic Church had been replaced by harassment and constant attacks; that jazz was no longer banned; that culture subjected to the rigours of socialist realism had gained a margin of freedom provided it moved within the limits defined by the authorities. Poland was in the last place in an international poll on the younger generation's "state of happiness", carried out in Czechoslovakia, Finland, Spain, Holland, Japan, Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia (only in Slovenia) and Great Britain in 1968. The percentage of affirmative replies to the question: "would you like to spend most of your life in your homeland", "are you pleased with your occupation or would you rather change it", "are you satisfied with your income", "are you satisfied with the influence you have on public matters in your country", and finally "are you satisfied with the influence your country has in the international arena" was the lowest in Po-

land³⁰. The young Poles' level of satisfaction did not increase after 1970. The opening to the West, the improvement in living conditions in the first half of the 1970s only stimulated aspirations instead of satisfying them. The disparity between the models perceived in the world after the liberalisation of passport policy, between the expectations born of the promises made by the new team and the possibility of gratifying one's desires and achieving one's aims was the source of growing tension in the whole society but above all in the younger generation.

The question of the main social forces involved in the successive outbreaks of sharp conflicts is connected with the question of mutual relations between the workers and the intelligentsia. It can be said that the intelligentsia played the leading role in organising a coherent opposition, while the mass protests, strikes, street disturbances and manifestations were the work of workers. The strikes and manifestations organised by students in 1968 are, of course, outside this pattern, but generally speaking one cannot but agree with the view that "it was not the deprivation of the whole of society of what it needed that lay at the root of social and political conflicts in Poland but the fact that the needs of the working class were not met"³¹. It was the workers, a class whose level of education was steadily rising, a class officially appointed as "the ruling, leading class", "the hegemon of the nation" that in an overwhelming majority felt they had no influence on what was going on in the country and in their workplaces. They frequently adduced the official doctrine. "They write: a worker is said to represent the leading class, a worker is said to have rights, but in practice they are thrashing and exterminating us". "We are fed up with assertions that if the worker is in power he should have a say also among the higher strata"³². Very significant are the results of polls held by the Centre for the Methodology of Sociological Research of Warsaw University's Institute of Sociology in 1985: two-thirds of the

³⁰ J. Kurczewski, *Dobre państwo jako zagadnienie socjologiczne. Referat na zebraniu Oddziału Warszawskiego Polskiego Towarzystwa Socjologicznego 21.V.1979 (A Good State as a Sociological Question. Paper read at a meeting of the Polish Sociological Society's Warsaw Branch on 21.5.1975)*, in: *Konflikt i "Solidarność"*, "Zeszyty Ośrodka Badań Społecznych", № 4, Warszawa 1981, p. 17.

³¹ P. Krasucki, U. Doroszevska, J. T. Lipski, *Socjomedyczna pamiątka po komunie (A Socio-medical Reminder of Communism)*, Warszawa 1991, p. 77.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 158, 153.

respondents thought they did not have enough influence on the situation in their workplace. "The workers ... say that far from feeling to be the sovereign, the hegemon or the leading class, they feel they mean nothing as far as authority is concerned", write the authors of a report on that poll³³. As a result of the wide gap between the apologia for the working class, inscribed in the ritual and language of politics at that time, and the real position of that class, workers kept claiming their rights and the place due them according to the ideology in force. Compared with other social strata, the peasants and the intelligentsia, the workers, especially those employed in big industry and mining, were not underprivileged, but they were aware of their strength and significance and also of the fact their needs, not only economic ones, had not been met. The myth of "the leading working class" and the ruling bodies' deadly fear of workers' protests gave workers' manifestations a rank never acquired by activities organised by the intelligentsia. The October change and Gomułka's accession to power were mainly the result of the riots in Poznań, of workers' activities all over the country, of the threat of strikes which the party apparatus found it hard to prevent and of the nascent movement of workers' selfgovernment with its centre in the Żerań Motorcar Factory and other Warsaw enterprises. The intelligentsia — the press headed by "Po prostu", the clubs, students, literary and scientific circles and those party functionaries who had succumbed to the general atmosphere and begun to identify themselves with national and democratic slogans — could not by themselves have provoked such a deep crisis of the system and could not have been the cause of a change in the instruments of power used by the communists. It was the workers' protest that overthrew the Gomułka team in December 1970 and brought Gierek to power. In July and August 1980 workers' strikes gave rise to the great nation-wide "Solidarity" movement which endangered the political system of the Polish People's Republic. Their consequence was yet another change in the PZPR leadership, the retreat of Gierek, who was replaced by Stanisław Kania. As Krzysztof Pomian wrote in 1976: "it is the workers who were the greatest threat to secretaries for they are the only people who can effectively defy brutal force and in this way turn opposition

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

to a decision into the nucleus of a confrontation which can lead to political changes”³⁴.

Opinions on the interdependence of the intelligentsia and the workers in successive crisis do not differ much. It has been stressed that the two groups co-operated in 1956, that working class circles did not react to students’ protest and intellectuals’ activities in 1968 and that as a result the 1968 protests were brutally suppressed by militiamen’s truncheons and gas and by brass knuckles used by pseudo-workers in the courtyard of Warsaw University and by words in an anti-Semitic and anti-intelligentsia campaign. I do not share Konstancy Jeleński’s opinion that the slogans “Down with Zionists ... treason ... trouble-makers”, inscribed on hundreds of posters at mass meetings, indicated that “the party can mobilise a hundred thousand Poles under the slogan of anti-Zionism”³⁵, but I must admit that the authorities succeeded in effectively isolating students and intellectuals from the rest of society, in taking advantage of the infighting between various coterie, and in neutralising, with greater or lesser success, or even winning over, groups receptive to nationalistic phraseology. In full view of a confused society, the authorities used a rich arsenal of nationalistic and populist slogans permeated with anti-Semitic implications, and combined this with the victimisation of the milieux and persons from the broadly conceived establishment who promoted democratisation processes. Although all this did not end in a change of guard at the top of the party and state hierarchy and did not lead to the seizure of power by the coterie of “partisans” headed by Mieczysław Moczar, on lower levels there was a reshuffle of personnel that would have been unthinkable in another situation. What is more important, the blow dealt in a climate of unbridled anti-Semitism and populism to the nascent opposition, in particular to its sections with a communist lineage (but also to such persons as Antoni Słonimski, Paweł Jasienica and Stefan Kisielewski) checked the formation of freedom movements and for some time blocked the chance of different segments of society, especially workers and intellectuals, coming to an understanding. By resorting to anti-Semitism, the autho-

³⁴ Quoted after Z. Korybutowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

³⁵ K. Jeleński, *Hańba czy wstyd? (Infamy or Shame)*, “Kultura” 1968 (Paryż), N° 5, reprint: *Zbiegi okoliczności (Coincidences)*, Paryż 1982, p. 328.

rities stifled the aspiration which was growing in Poland as well as in Czechoslovakia, an aspiration to introduce reforms that would have undermined the system. By a skilful use of intimidation and demagogy, the authorities succeeded in disabling the majority of society for a little while. The attempts to repeat this scenario in 1980–1981 failed.

The post-March reprisals, the arrests of many youth leaders, harassment, invigilation, telephone tapping and bugging, the emigration of many persons, the climate of defeat, aggravated by the Warsaw Pact forces' invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the feeling of being helpless in the face of Moscow and communism, paralysed the circles engaged in protests. What was also important was the fairly widespread opinion that the student riots were provoked by a feud between two party coteries. The theory of a "plot", combined as it was with the realisation of isolation, intensified the mood of helplessness and despondency. "March was a provocation intended to finish off the Jews", wrote Kisielowski in his diary; "two groups are pommelling each other and in between wanders Wiesio (Gomułka — K. K.), who understands nothing). Expressing his own feelings and those of his environment, the writer said: "The commies know how to revenge themselves, the general marasm and cowardice do the rest"³⁶. As a result of their condition and their disappointment with the workers' attitude, the unsubmissive part of the intelligentsia remained passive in December 1970.

According to Andrzej Friszke "The intelligentsia kept itself aloof from the working class protest. Some people believe that the intelligentsia did not support the workers in 1970 because the workers did not support the intelligentsia in 1968. This opinion probably expresses only a part of a most complex truth. In 1970 the democratic student and intellectual milieux were overpowered by the reprisals of 1968 and 1969. Apathy, a bitter sense of defeat and disbelief in the efficacy of resistance prevailed. The tragedy of Czechoslovakia, still fresh in people's minds, undermined the hope that the system could be reformed. Many people feared that a mass movement in defence of human right might lead to intervention and end with the stifling of all freedoms and

³⁶ S. Kisielowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 98, 168.

even with bloodshed on a large scale"³⁷. Some people again suspected a provocation: "I am not pleased with this disarray", wrote Kisielewski on December 16, "for, as is usual in Poland, nothing good can come out of it. When the lower classes begin to act violently, this means that somebody higher up has incited them for purposes known to himself". A day later he wrote: "I believe that the Gdańsk workers' demonstration is sincere, like that of Poznań workers in 1956, but I am sure that then and now there must have been some secret party activity... It is impossible to reduce everything to provocation... but one cannot help guessing. The whole thing was decided in advance, there is no doubt about this. Is this a new determined operation by "Moczar's oppositional group?"³⁸

The absence of the intelligentsia in workers' riots in December 1970 and five years later, in 1976, in the June protests in Ursus, Radom, Płock and other places, undoubtedly increased the distance between these two large segments of society. But was the lack of a "common front of workers and intellectuals" really responsible for the workers' defeat in 1970? Such a view is held by Andrzej Friszke, and not by him alone. The refusal to believe that the workers' protests were spontaneous, that they were not provoked by some hidden forces (by "imperialists", "Zionists", "traitors to the nation", "counter-revolutionary forces", "anti-socialist elements", "instigators" or coterie fighting for power), like the conviction that in 1970 the workers were unable "to define the essential aims of their action precisely ... did not understand its political context, did not always know who was their ally and who the enemy"³⁹, grew from one stem. Just as anti-intelligentsia feeling were quite strong among workers at that time, until 1980 in fact, the intelligentsia did not identify itself with the forms of workers' protests either, with their practice of attacking party committees and setting them on fire, with their clashes with the militia. The intelligentsia did not understand and underrated the real motives of the rebellion, regarding it as a result of dissatisfaction caused mainly by economic conditions and intensified by price rises, which played the role of a catalyst. There is no doubt that Jerzy Giedroyc's "Kultura" did much

³⁷ Z. Korybutowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

³⁸ S. Kisielewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 516, 517.

³⁹ Z. Korybutowicz, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

to bring the oppositional circles of the intelligentsia closer to workers' milieux. Jerzy Giedroyc assumed that the workers were the only potential force capable of overthrowing communism and in his periodical, his correspondence and personal contacts he urged the intelligentsia to go to the workers, take an interest in their needs, not only material ones, and work out a concrete programme addressed to them. "We shall never know with how many people from Poland the editor spoke about the working class problem and how many persons he persuaded that this was a first rank problem", writes Krzysztof Pomian. "Their number may not have been great, but these were often persons who exerted an influence on their environment".

"Kultura" co-created the climate thanks to which during the July and August 1980 strikes close co-operation was for the first time established between workers' leaders, intellectuals representing various circles of democratic opposition and Catholic circles; the nascent "Solidarity" movement was a truly nationwide movement. The credit for this is due mainly to KOR and the KSS/KOR (Social Self-Defence Committee). After the experiences of 1968 and 1970 the oppositional groups of the intelligentsia of various generations and orientations realised that joint action was needed and this was put into effect in 1976. Jacek Kuroń writes in his memoirs that on hearing about the strike in Ursus, he, Jan Józef Lipski and Adam Michnik wrote "a draft declaration expressing solidarity with the striking workers. We were fully convinced that the intellectuals should at once express their opinion on what was going on, for we were all guilty of silence in December 1970"⁴⁰. As early as June a declaration was issued; Józef Lipski called it "a protest of a group of persons from the oppositional intelligentsia milieux which expressed their solidarity with the persecuted workers"⁴¹; it was signed by 14 persons, in addition to the trio mentioned above also by Jan Olszewski, Władysław Siła-Nowicki, Stefan Kisielewski and Father Jan Zieja. In fact, apart from just one sentence expressing solidarity ("We express solidarity with Polish workers"), the document demanded "transformations proposed in the constitutional debate". After stating that in "the existing system of power

⁴⁰ J. Kuroń, *Gwiazdny czas (Starlit Time)*, Londyn 1991, p. 3.

⁴¹ J. J. Lipski, *Komitet Obrony Robotników*, p. 43.

the only form in which the real attitudes of the citizens come to light are outbreaks of social dissatisfaction which may have dangerous consequences”, the authors of the declaration called for reforms: “In the difficult situation of our state they are an expression of common national interests. They are also the only guarantee that the fundamental matters of our national existence will be solved by ourselves”⁴². Slightly later, on July 26, Jerzy Andrzejewski published an open letter to the “persecuted participants in the workers’ protest”⁴³. The Workers’ Defence Committee was set up on July 17, the first day of the Ursus trial. However, despite its indubitable services in helping the victimised workers of Radom and Ursus, despite its later involvement in the establishment of Free Trade Unions and the establishment of the secret paper “Robotnik” in August 1978, the Committee did not win broad confidence among workers, a fact which the authorities tried to make use of in 1980–1981, when they attempted to divide “Solidarity” into a working-class current and the KOR groups allegedly to overthrow the authority⁴⁴. These manoeuvres in which the authorities hoped to make use of the Church hierarchy and Lech Wałęsa did not yield the expected results.

For lack of studies it is impossible to determine the real role played by the intelligentsia, not only its pre-August oppositional groups, in the “Solidarity” revolution. According to Jacek Kurczewski, the “simple formulas about the workers’ alliance with a part of the intelligentsia” do not correspond to the social reality of those days. By posing the question “If an educated man helps workers, is he an agitator or does he simply take part in a conflict?” Kurczewski formulated a controversial theory that “in August a new class launched a struggle, a class of people subordinated directly to the authorities in state-controlled institutions and enterprises, a class of people who were better educated or earned more than the lower pauperised social strata or classes”. According to him, the difference between people doing intellectual work and workpeople was in fact obliterated in the

⁴² Z. Hemmerling, M. Nadolski (eds), *Opozycja demokratyczna w Polsce 1976–1980. Wybór dokumentów* (*The Democratic Opposition in Poland 1976–1980. Selected Documents*), Warszawa 1994, pp. 60–61.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 65.

⁴⁴ Archives of the State Security Office, call number 2309/IV/4, part 5, pp. 109–114, Analysis of the situation and proposals of the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ special staff, 21.12.1980.

Polish People's Republic and the statistical division into blue-collar and white-collar workers was a mere convention. According to Kurczewski, the other side of the conflict was "the ruling class"⁴⁵. It seems, however, that the sociologists who asserted that the differences between the intelligentsia and the workers were disappearing underestimated the distance between the two classes and their strong sense of their own identity which was determined by tradition, interests, social standards and behaviour. Empirical research conducted among Warsaw and Lublin workers in 1983 and 1984 showed that, probably under the influence of "Solidarity", workers viewed the intelligentsia mainly in the categories of ethos and frequently referred to the intelligentsia's traditional role as the nation's leader. In their opinion it was the intelligentsia's duty to fight for a better future, to seek common good and steer the country wisely. What the workers expected of the intelligentsia was moral backing, cultural patterns, a good example, wisdom and help in expressing their own opinions⁴⁶.

The participation and role of workers and intelligentsia in the cyclic mass protests is closely connected with the question of the motives of this protest. According to a widespread theory, the workers' rebellion were an expression of dissatisfaction with the work and living conditions, while political and national content was brought in from the outside. This theory was propagated by the communists not only in public but also at closed party meetings, although opinions on this matter different both at the plenary meeting of the PZPR Central Committee and of the Political Bureau⁴⁷. It was asserted that two currents could be perceived in all riots, starting with those in Poznań: the current of workers' dissatisfaction and a counter-revolutionary current. It cannot be defined that what gave to the riots in June 1956 as well as in December 1970, June 1976 and August 1980 was the

⁴⁵ J. Kurczewski, *Dawny ustrój i rewolucja (The Old System and the Revolution)*, paper read on December 12, 1980 at a meeting of the Polish Sociological Society's Warsaw Branch, in: *Konflikt i "Solidarność"*.

⁴⁶ J. Babiuch-Luxmore, *Portrety i autoportrety inteligencji polskiej (Portraits and Self-Portraits of Polish Intelligentsia)*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 161 ff.

⁴⁷ Cf. Seventh plenary meeting of the PZPR Central Committee, July 18–28, 1956, in: Z. Rykowski, W. Władyka, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 ff.; *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 1, pp. 86 ff.; *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 2 — PZPR a "Solidarność" 1980–1981 (PZPR and "Solidarity" 1980–1981), ed. Z. Włodek, Londyn 1992, pp. 60 ff.

protest of workers in big industrial works, a protest provoked by the arrogant reaction of trade union and state functionaries to the workers' demands concerning norms, organisation, safety at work and the system of wages (Poznań 1956) or the announcement of a considerable rise in the prices of basic foodstuffs (Gdańsk 1970, Radom 1976, 1980). However, there is not a shadow of a doubt that non-economic slogans and demands were raised during all these protests. During the mass meetings which preceded the declaration of the strike and street demonstrations in Poznań on June 28, the workers not only demanded better living conditions and fair wages but also threatened the authorities: "if those at the helm cannot govern, let them go", "the party will be ousted from factories, the workers themselves will rule and the profits will be taken by workers, as is the case in Yugoslavia"⁴⁸. The shipyard workers marching in a procession in Gdańsk in December 1970 cried: "Down with the red bourgeoisie", "Down with Gomułka"⁴⁹. A worker from the Railway Rolling-Stock Repair Works who participated in the incidents in front of the Voievodship Committee stated in his account: "The most pleasant was the moment when large portraits of Lenin and Gomułka were brought out from inside the building. They were brought out, shown to the public and dropped from a great height. The crowd which stood close by applauded loudly and sang "A hundred years" and probably also "Poland has not perished yet (Polish national anthem) for the umpteenth time, for this was repeated all the time"⁵⁰. Many of the demands sent in to the Lenin Shipyards' Strike Committee after the declaration of a stay-in strike on December 16 were of a political, even revolutionary, character; the workers demanded a change in political institutions, dismissal of despotic officials and the red bourgeoisie from power, a just division of the national income, non-interference of the party in the trade unions, the right to strike and to demonstrate. The demand that Gomułka, Cyrankiewicz and local party dignitaries be dismissed was repeated frequently. As previously in Poznań and later in Radom, the demands for "bread and freedom" functioned jointly. In 1970 there was an additional demand for "truth" as a response to the lies of politicians and the

⁴⁸ P. Machcewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–82.

⁴⁹ *Grudzień 1970*, pp. 122, 136.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 176.

mass media. Some members of the Political Bureau realised that this was a conflict between the working masses and the ruling party. "A sharp, profound conflict has arisen between the working class and the leadership of the party", said Mieczysław Jagielski at a meeting on December 19. "The rise in prices has overstepped all limits"⁵¹.

If we want to define the character of the successive waves of rioting we must determine the place and significance of national and religious ideas in the workers' protests. Paweł Machcewicz's research as well as sources indicate that national and religious ideas were referred to the second phase, when the protesters took to the streets and clashes with the militia, the security forces or the army occurred. The presence of these ideas was the most apparent in Poznań where, as Machcewicz writes, "The crowd that was formed during the procession and meeting in Stalin Square turned into «the nation» during clashes with security forces. The insurrectionary atmosphere found an expression in the shouts and inscriptions on banners: «Down with the Russians», «Down with the Soviets», «Down with the oppressors of Polish people»"⁵². There were no anti-Soviet or clearly anti-communist slogans in Gdańsk in 1970 and in Radom in 1976. The demonstrators sang the *Internationale* (in addition to the national anthem, *The Oath (Rota)*: "We shall not yield our forebears' land, Nor see our language muted", and an old Polish hymn sung in Polish national uprisings: "O God who through the ages/ Hast girded Poland with power and fame"), thus recalling the tradition of revolutionary struggles. But there, too, the emotional climate was created first and foremost by national symbols. Describing the events of December 15 in Gdańsk, a shipyard worker says: "At first it looked like a national uprising to me. White-red banners were fluttering. White-red arm-bands could be seen on the sleeves of many workers"⁵³. And another recollection of the Gdańsk events: "Somebody in the crowd began to sing «Poland has not perished yet», something was coming to life ... Only a moment earlier everybody seemed to be filled with fear of some kind ... The dense crowd sang «Poland has not perished yet» ... and when the words «March, march, Dąbrowski» came,

⁵¹ *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 1, p. 91.

⁵² P. Machcewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 96 ff.

⁵³ *Grudzień 1970*, pp. 124 ff.

the crowd in unison marched on. I realised then the strength of the national anthem's words; in a moment of indifference, when one is resigned, the words «Poland has not perished yet/ So long as we still live» are not so strong, but when it came to «March, march, Dąbrowski», I felt this was a command; everybody felt as if he was standing face to face with the enemy. The words «March, march, Dąbrowski» came, and we all moved on in unison. We made a few steps, just a few steps, and that was the beginning of the revenge on the building of the Voievodship Committee”⁵⁴. If the four workers' rebellions are compared from this point of view, it can be said that after 1956 protest against national coercion and religious oppression abated. It was revived at the end of the 1970s owing to the interaction of many factors, the most important being the inconsistent policy of the authorities which were unable to meet the national and religious aspirations of society without undermining the foundations of the system. It has been known since the time of Alexis Tocqueville that people begin to claim their rights when the oppression abates. An extremely important role in this process of national and religious rebirth was played by John Paul II's pilgrimage in 1979. All this found an expression in the strikes of 1980 and then in the “Solidarity” movement.

The strikes in July–August 1980 were a new quality in the history of mass protests also because this was the first time in the history of the Polish People's Republic that the authorities had not suppressed them in blood. One can argue to what extent the reaction to the riots in Poznań, Gdańsk, Radom and to the students' demonstrations in 1968 were commensurate with the danger posed to the existing order and whether the use of force was justified from the point of view of the authority. From the political point of view it must be admitted that irrespective of what the participants had in mind, these explosions of protests did contain a revolutionary charge and could have led to a radical change of the political system, which — as the experience of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 had shown — would have inevitably meant Soviet military intervention. The highest party bodies regarded all mass demonstrations as a counter-revolution, being of the opinion that they were directed,

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

at least in part, against the authority and the existing order. The speeches made by members of the Central Committee at a plenary meeting in July 1956 were in this strain. In his paper Edward Ochab pointed to the "social roots" of the strikes and manifestations and declared them to be the work of "brawlers and demagogues"; he also said that "a counter-revolutionary underground" had brought about "a bloody provocation and disturbances in the streets"⁵⁵. Władysław Gomułka came out against this theory in October 1956, but in December 1970 he and Zenon Kliszko, who was sent to Gdańsk, declared that "counter-revolutionary elements" came to light during the riots; in consequence, the decision to use arms was taken on December 15. In the opinion of Gomułka, the riots in Gdańsk were produced by "provocateurs, saboteurs and spies"⁵⁶. This was what Ochab had thought about the 1956 events. It follows from the documents of the Political Bureau of the PZPR Central Committee that in August 1980, the strikers' demands, in particular the demand for the establishment of free trade unions, were thought to be a direct threat to the political system, even though the workers did not take to the streets and there was no threat of rioting. Stanisław Kania said that the demands were aimed against "the socialist system" and that the establishment of a trade union "socialist in name but anti-socialist in essence" would mean the loss of power. At the same meeting, on August 26, Edward Gierek said: "Today they are demanding trade unions; they will create a force and then will make an assault on the party, the government, the Sejm. When they have got the trade unions, they will put forward another political demand ... What does it mean to change the political system in our country?... Have we the right to give up power when a general strike breaks out?"⁵⁷ General Wojciech Jaruzelski made the matter clear: "We must explain that this is a struggle to decide who defeats whom and make clear the danger this entails"⁵⁸. If force was not used that time even though the party realised that compliance with the strikers' demands might, like an avalanche, put in motion a process that would entail

⁵⁵ Z. Rykowski, W. Władyka, *op. cit.*, pp. 196 ff.

⁵⁶ *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 1, p. 154.

⁵⁷ *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 2, pp. 60 ff., meeting of August 26, 1980.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 78 ff., meeting of August 26, 1980.

radical changes in the political system, changes that would go beyond the boundaries allowed by Moscow, this was because the party was aware of the extent and strength of the protest. "One can think of various solutions with the exception of those which lead to a precipice and are based on the hope a rebirth, for nothing will rise from the ashes", said Kania. General Jaruzelski argued that martial law could not be introduced, for "how can rigour be enforced when the whole country comes to a halt?"⁵⁹ The measures taken by the party were based on three assumptions: the foundations of the political system, including the communist party's hegemonic power, may not be infringed; the crisis should be solved without bringing the army into the streets and without bloodshed, mainly by political means; the crisis must be solved by internal means without the intervention of Warsaw Pact forces.

Before Leonid Brezhnev publicly declared his doctrine at the Fifth Congress of the PZPR in November 1968, the troubles in Poland, that is, mass strikes, demonstrations, riots and their pacification, did not violate the existing system of dependence on the USSR. But for the fact that in June 1956 Marshal Rokossowski's order to the army to march in must have been approved by the Warsaw Pact command, there are no documents or accounts that would have indicated direct Soviet reaction during and after the riots in Poznań. We also do not know anything about the Soviets' attitude in March 1968. A little more can be said about Soviet moves in December 1970. On December 15 or 16, the Soviet ambassador Averky Aristov called on Władysław Gomułka; On December 16, Józef Cyrankiewicz was told that "Soviet comrades would like to know confidentially how the government appraises the situation, for Comrade Gomułka has not yet phoned though serious things are taking place"⁶⁰. Deputy Premier Piotr Jaroszewicz was then in Moscow and had a talk with Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin in the evening of December 16⁶¹. According to Jaroszewicz, Kosygin said: "We have learned today that some members of your party leadership mentioned in conversations with our ambassador in Warsaw that if the conflict

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 84 ff., meeting of August 29, 1980.

⁶⁰ *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 1, p. 422. Statement deposited by J. Cyrankiewicz with a commission of the Political Bureau (s.a.).

⁶¹ P. Jaroszewicz, *Przerywam milczenie 1939–1989 (I Am Interrupting Silence 1939–1989)*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 158–159.

widened there would be Soviet intervention and military assistance. Do not count on our intervention. You yourself must quickly bring the situation under control". On December 17, Brezhnev rang up Gomułka, and the Polish leader informed the Political Bureau of the conversation. Brezhnev asked "what the situation looks like and whether there is any danger of the events spreading all over the country. He asked about the situation in the army and whether we had sufficient means to restore order". Gomułka told him that "the events have a political background. For the time being our forces are strong enough to restore order. In case of need, we will of course ask Soviet comrades for help. They can rest assured that Poland will always be an unshakable member of the Warsaw Treaty"⁶². There were further telephone contacts between Gomułka and Brezhnev between December 17 and 19, and Cyrankiewicz had a talk with Kosygin. In the night from December 18 to 19 Aristov handed Cyrankiewicz a letter from the leadership of the CPSU Central Committee to the Political Bureau of the PZPR with questions for a political solution of the conflict in Poland. Gomułka's attitude to the prospect of Soviet military intervention is reflected in his words which were quoted by Cyrankiewicz: "If this continues to spread we will shoot, and if this is not enough we will call in the Soviet army and everything will be drowned in blood. And where will all defenders of the fatherland go to? What will happen to our independence?"⁶³. We do not know whether Gomułka was ready to ask for Soviet military assistance to defend the country against "counter-revolution", nor do we know whether Brezhnev and Kosygin would have refused to intervene militarily irrespective of the development of the situation, but this seems unlikely. However, there is not a shadow of a doubt that Moscow influenced the decisions taken in Warsaw.

The situation in 1980 was not different. The Soviets began to exert pressure in the last days of August when Aristov handed Gierek an official statement "expressing concern about the development of the situation in Poland. "They think", said Gierek as

⁶² J. Eisler, S. Trepczyński, *Grudzień '70 wewnątrz "Białego Domu"* (December 1970 in the "White House"), Warszawa 1991, p. 29. Note on the meeting of December 17, 1970.

⁶³ *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 1, p. 422. Statement by J. Cyrankiewicz.

a meeting of the Political Bureau on August 28, "that our counter-offensive is not very effective"⁶⁴. It is known from German sources that the USSR feared that Poland might break loose from the Soviet bloc, but was not prepared for an armed intervention, if only because of its involvement in Afghanistan. All the greater was therefore the pressure exerted on Polish communists. Documents show that the establishment of the Independent Self-Governing Trades Union "Solidarny" was received with great discontent in Moscow. At a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPSU Central Committee on October 29 — on the eve of the visit paid to Moscow by Stanisław Kania and Józef Pińkowski — Leonid Brezhnev, Dimitri Ustinov and Andrei Gromyko, believing that "counter-revolution" was rife in Poland, expressed the view that martial law would have to be introduced⁶⁵. It was the Soviet leadership's consistent policy — a realistic one as it turned out on December 13, 1981 — that the movement developing in Poland should be stifled by the Poles themselves; the USSR regarded an armed intervention as a last resort. But the threat of intervention was a useful tool for blackmail.

The suppression of successive manifestations of collective protest by force — by the army in 1956, 1970 and 1981, and by militia units (*ZOMO*) armed with tear-gas throwers, truncheons and water cannons in 1968 and 1976 — and the mass reprisals that followed, arrests, trials, did not mean a return to the *status quo ante*. All these "crises" had varied results, immediate and long-term ones. Directly or indirectly they were part of the behind-the-scenes "wars on top", also when, as in 1970 and 1980, they did not lead to changes in the posts of party and government chiefs. In 1956 the Poznań riots were the main link in the process which led to the October change and brought Gomulka to power; in 1968 Gomulka retained the post of first secretary but his position was greatly weakened by other forces in the *PZPR*. It has been asserted, but not proved, that the crises of March 1968 and December 1970 were provoked by party coteries, but even if they were not, they served as an argument

⁶⁴ *Tajne dokumenty Biura Politycznego*, vol. 2, p. 78.

⁶⁵ K. Kersten, *Warunki i okoliczności wprowadzenia stanu wojennego w Polsce (The Conditions and Circumstances in which Martial Law Was Introduced in Poland)*, expert appraisal for the Sejm's Constitutional Responsibility Commission, typescript.

against the team in power whose wrong policy and inability to solve the conflicts had led to an escalation of tension or to bloodshed, as they did in Poznań in 1956 and in Gdańsk in 1970. At the eighth plenary meeting of the *PZPR* Central Committee in October 1956 Gomułka said that the Poznań workers had protested "against the evil which has spread in the social system ... against the distortions of the fundamental principles of socialism which is their idea". In his opinion it was the wrong policy of the party and government that was the cause of the Poznań tragedy. In 1970 he in turn was declared to be responsible and was removed from power. His successor met with the same fate in 1980. It would be a simplification to regard these "palace revolutions" as a simple struggle for power or as manoeuvres intended to ensure a minimum of social acquiescence to the party at the expense of a few scapegoats. Both elements undoubtedly existed, but the changes in ruling teams were not mere reshuffles. Gomułka, Gierek and Kania, brought to power on the wave of social protests, modified the policy of their predecessors. The manifestations of rebellion, which were the climax of the society's latent resistance to the existing system, were an important factor in the slow process of its erosion and final destruction. Combined with other forms of resistance, with the defence of peasants' land ownership, with the aspiration to expand freedom in culture, with opposition to lies and with observance of traditional national and religious values, they extorted gradual concessions from the authorities. This was most obvious after 1956 when an end was put to totalitarianism in Poland. Social pressure (reflected in the democratisation trends in the *PZPR*) extorted concessions. After October 1956, the communists renounced ideological rule step by step, confining themselves to a control of politically important behaviour. They recognised some elements of pluralism in culture, widened the existent of freedom in science and reconciled themselves to the existence of private economy in farming, but they included the peasant economy indirectly in the orbit of the centrally steered economy through agricultural circles. In spite of harassment and repression, they allowed the Catholic Church to function as a powerful institution not subordinated to the authority. The March 1968 events accelerated the defeat of communist ideology; they, and to an even greater extent the suppression of democratic transformations in Czechoslovakia,

showed that the programmes for an improvement of the system in the name of the values inscribed on its banners were simply utopian. This was the end of revisionism. Jerzy Eisler points out that this gave rise to the formation of what is known as the 1968 generation, which was later to play such an important role in the seventies and eighties. At the same time the *PZPR* adopted some ideas of the National Radical Camp, a nationalistic and anti-Semitic organisation active at the end of the 1930s, and even though this was a limited adoption, it played an important role in the formation of "national communism" which never seized power but which Gomułka, Gierek and Jaruzelski tolerated or perhaps had to tolerate.

Compared with 1956, the influence of the December 1970 protest may seem to have been limited. No changes comparable to the abandonment of collectivisation in 1956 were made in the political system. But the December protest played an extremely important role in the destruction of the system for it opened Poland to the world, awakened aspirations and led to an unsuccessful attempt to modernise the country, an attempt which resulted in a profound economic crisis. A successive explosion was inevitable.

To sum up: the cyclic outbreaks of collective protests inscribed in the history of the Polish People's Republic, those mostly spontaneous "rebellions", "revolts", "riots", "disturbances", were links in a broad resistance to the order imposed on Poland after World War II. Their brutal suppression — a bloody suppression in 1956 and 1970 — led to an escalation of tension and crystallisation of oppositional milieux. The result was that in this who-will-defeat-whom confrontation, to recall General Jaruzelski's words, the balance of forces was such that only a Soviet military intervention could have counteracted the aspirations of Polish society. But when the era of Mikhail Gorbachev started, the Soviets deprived the Polish communists of the argument "we shall do this ourselves for otherwise the Soviet army will come in".

(Translated by Janina Dorosz)