

3 – The People’s Republic – part 2

Polish Politics in a European Context

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Polish October

1953 Stalin dies

- Khrushchev succeeds Stalin – to increase his power he holds his „Secret speech“ at the XX party congress
 - *Criticism of Cult of Personality*
 - *Criticism of terror regime*

Leader in satellite states based all their power on being “Stalin’s men”

- ⇒ Status of leaders in the party is shattered
- ⇒ Without terrorist regime population rejects oppression (Summer 1956 workers riots in Poznań crushed by Soviet army)

1956 1968 East Block 1970

Polish October

Reaction of Party to unrest and economic crisis

- Gomułka released from home arrest and made him General Secretary of the party

He proposes a „*Polish way to Socialism*”

- Removal of Soviet generals from the Polish Army
- Intellectual liberalisation and new arrangement with Church
- Abolishing corporative farms

Khrushchev moves the army towards Poland, but gives in when Gomułka promises loyalty with the USSR

- The events of the Polish October trigger the Hungarian Uprising in November 1956

1956 1968 East Block 1970

Reforms under Gomułka

- End of Stalinist terror
 - Undoing collectivisation
 - Slowing down industrialisation
 - Agreement between State and Church:
 - Catholic Church and institutions receive limited autonomy (Caritas, publishing houses, Catholic University in Lublin)
 - Catholic NGOs receive seat in Sejm
 - Liberalisation of cultural life
 - Movies by Andrzej Wajda: „Kanał” or „Popiół i Diament”
 - Books: *Eight Day of the Week* by Marek Hłasko
- In 1958 end of liberal period – Anti-Catholic and Anti-Intellectual campaigns

1956 1968 East Block 1970

Social Structure during Communism

Officially there are three different elements of society

- Workers (robotnik)
- Peasant (rolnik)
- Inteligentia (white collar worker or university graduates)

The first two groups have privileged access to higher education
Small entrepreneurs and independent craftsmen were discriminated by the system

The National Front reflects this „Socialist Pluralism“:

- Communist Party PZPR
- Organisations of the society (trade unions, ZMP,...)
- United Polish Peasant Party (ZSL)
- Democratic Party (SD) – for Catholic

1956

1968

East
Block

1970

1968 in Poland

Internal factors:

- First generation born after WW II – questions societal rules and norms
- Students and Intellectuals criticise censorship
- Economic stagnation diminishes public support for Gomułka
- Conflict within the PZPR: Modernisers vs. Nationalist and Stalinists

External factors

- Prague Spring: A. Dubček proclaims „Socialism with a Human Face“
- Poland like most Communist countries takes a pro-Arab and anti-Zionist position in the Six Days War 1967

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1968 in Poland

Trigger of events in March 1968

- A theatre piece by Mickiewicz (Dziady) is considered anti-Soviet and banned from stage
- Students demonstrate against Soviet pressure and conditions on universities

Reaction of the system

- Workers are mobilised against Students
- Party hardliner accuse Zionists of agitating students
- Anti-zionist campaign becomes openly anti-Semitic („Syjoniści do Syjamu!“)
 - Exclusion of Jews from the Party and universities
 - Majority of Jews is pressured to leave Poland

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Brezhnev Doctrine

Prague Spring leads to following declaration:

"When forces that are hostile to socialism try to turn the development of some socialist country towards capitalism, it becomes not only a problem of the country concerned, but a common problem and concern of all socialist countries."

Despite all bi-lateral agreements of the Eastern Block guaranteeing sovereignty to its member, they are limited in deciding their own paths of development

1968 Poland takes part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia

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COMECON

Council for Mutual Economic Assistance

- 1949 founded as answer to the Marshall Plan
 - Platform for regional division of labour
 - Countries negotiate trade agreement which are fulfilled by agreements between companies
 - Trade is made in form of barter calculated in Transfer Rubbles
- Trade system includes also Angola, Yugoslavia, Finland, ...

Effects:

- Division of labour was a political decision
- Quantity based system did not support quality of products
- Subvention of energy encouraged waste of raw materials

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Poland during Détente

Until 1970 Western Germany did not have direct diplomatic relations with Poland

The Warsaw Treaty of 1970 was a milestone in the „Ostpolitik“ of W. Brant

- De-facto recognition of Poland's western border
- German minority in Poland is allowed to emigrate

Poland plays an active role in the Helsinki Final Act (1975)

Logic behind the agreement is linkage

- The West offers economic co-operation and promises territorial integrity
- Eastern Block recognises human and civil rights

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Strikes 1970

- Continuing economic crisis
- Party decided increase of prices for basic good, leading to worker strikes in whole Poland
- In Gdynia the situation gets out of control and the army opens fire on striking workers
- To get the situation under control leadership of PZPR is changed:

Gomułka is replaced by Edward Gierek (technocratic and moderniser)

The events of 1970 are crucial for the formation of Solidarność in 1980

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Gierek's Poland

Economic reforms

- Modernisation of Polish industries through technologies and credits from the West
- Credits should be paid back with exports of products produced with Western licences
- Shift to supply with consumer goods (some only for Dollar)
- Massive construction of flats (prefab), roads, ...

Social changes

- Less Communist ideology and propaganda in media and education
- Easy to travel abroad
- Relaxation of censorship (Wajda's „Czwólek z Marmuru“)

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