

A Spectre Haunts The East

Gorbachev has taken the world by storm. In contrast, little so far seems to have happened to the Soviet relationship with Eastern Europe. In this special feature, Neal Ascherson discusses what *perestroika* is likely to mean for Eastern Europe, while Misha Glenny, Michael Simmons and George Kolankiewicz present case studies of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the GDR and Poland

The German socialist scholar Ekkehart Krippendorff once wrote that 'foreign policy was internal policy'. He meant by this that it is always illegitimate to regard the external policy of a state in isolation, or to identify 'foreign policy interests' or goals which stopped, so to speak, at the frontiers. Given that the makers of foreign policy can acquire some autonomy, or form a powerful lobby on their own, it remains true - according to Krippendorff - that the decision-making of a state in the external world always relates to the deeper purpose of preserving its internal system or assisting the priorities of that system.

This is a useful way to begin examining the development of Soviet foreign policy in the era of *perestroika*. How is the Soviet relationship with the outside world, within and without the Soviet 'sphere of influence', affected by the huge drama of 'restructuring' at home, and how - in turn - do events or prospects in the world affect what is taking place or may take place within the USSR?

In some areas, a connection between internal and foreign policy is already identifiable. In the broadest terms, a 'clearing of decks' is taking place. Reform at home requires concentration not only of resources but of attention, and this means that expensive or ticklish commitments must be reviewed and if possible abandoned. The most obvious example is, of course, Mr Gorbachev's headlong drive towards total nuclear disarmament, whose impetus initially so disconcerted the United States - and still disconcerts European Nato members. With this, if it succeeds, will go eventual force reductions on the ground: in Europe, already along the Chinese frontier, and if a face-saving settlement can be reached, by a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan. New efforts, not so far very fruitful, are being made to mend fences with China, which means that Soviet policy in Indochina will have to be reviewed sooner rather than later.

The domestic motives here are primarily to reduce the colossal expenditure of the USSR upon defence, and to release resources for the 'acceleration' of the Soviet economy. 'Summitry' with President Reagan and meetings with other Western leaders serve the same purpose. What is not yet clear is whether this more intense and positive engagement of Soviet diplomacy in the world is a permanent opening, or whether it constitutes a phase designed to remove outstanding problems so that the USSR can, in the longer run, afford to pay *less* attention to the outside world and concentrate on the transformation of Soviet society 'in one country'.

But when the focus swivels from the West or the developing world to Eastern Europe - the states of the Warsaw Pact

- the picture is curiously ambiguous. The relationship between the Soviet Union and its client states in Europe has certainly changed over the past three years. But so far these changes have been cautious and piecemeal, and nothing suggests a dramatic transformation to parallel Gorbachev's revolutions in home economic policy or in external arms-reduction policy.

Gorbachev seems to be treating the Pact as a convoy moving at the pace of the slowest ships: encouraging the slow to move faster, but not giving the potentially swifter the green light to surge ahead out of sight.

The early mystery of his attitude to Czechoslovakia has been resolved, to some extent: Gustav Husak, who evidently faced criticism in Moscow, was obliged to resign. That seems to have been the extent of direct Soviet intervention. Milos Jakes, Husak's successor as leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, does not feel like a Soviet nominee, and probably gained the post as a result of manipulation by Vasil Bilak, the most spectacular hard-liner. The position of Lubomir Strougal, prime minister and the figure most clearly committed to some kind of economic reform, seems actually weaker than before Husak's fall. The whole episode suggests a Soviet policy of trying to initiate change, away from the autarkic stasis of the late Husak years, but of refraining from sustained pressure, leaving subsequent development to the ruling party concerned.

In the GDR, Honecker appears to have resisted any hints that he should alter his internal policies, and acts as if he were confident that he can pursue his developing relationship with the Federal Republic at his own pace and in his own way. Neither does Gorbachev, in spite of evident remonstrations, seem to have made much impact upon the increasingly disastrous course of the Ceausescu regime in Romania.

Poland is a particularly fascinating case, for here there has been a limited attempt to extend *glasnost* beyond the Soviet frontiers. In 1986, *Literaturnaya Gazeta* carried an interview with Cardinal Glemp, but accompanied it with a quite astonishing introduction, disclosing to Soviet readers for the first time the fact of overwhelming Catholic allegiance in the working class and the open tolerance of devout religious faith among its members by the Polish United Workers' Party. The tone of the article was a mild 'all highly peculiar, but that is the way Poland is.'

Soon afterwards, Gorbachev announced that there should be 'no white spaces' in Soviet-Polish history, and a joint commission of historians was appointed to fill them in. One of the Soviet members remarked in a *Polityka* interview that 'Katyn, above all Katyn' should be among the topics covered.

How far this will go remains to be seen. The Polish press, light-years ahead of the Soviet media in its degree

East Germany
 Population: 16.7m
 *NMP per capita: £4,507
 NMP growth: 1987 2.0% 1988 2.5%

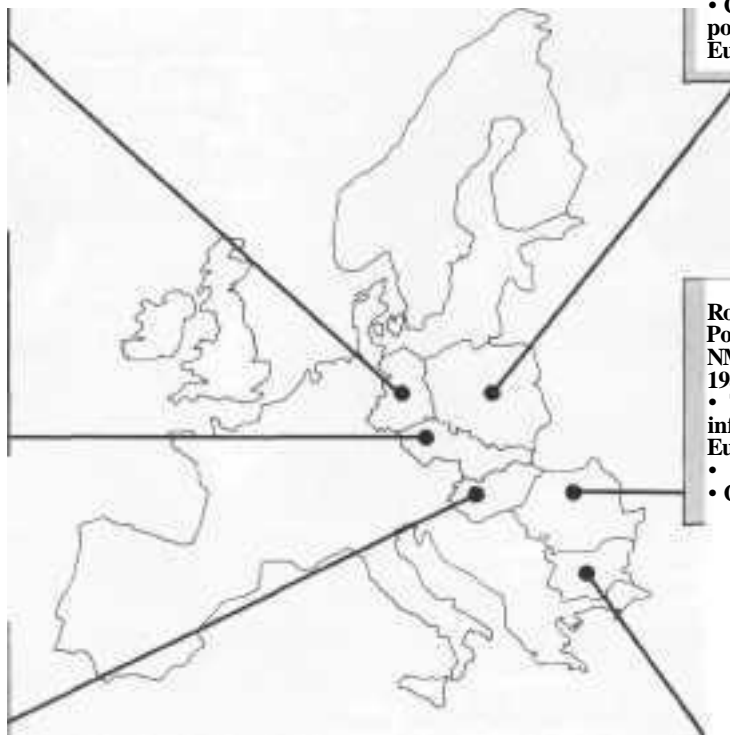
- Strongest economy in Eastern Europe
- Society least touched by *glasnost* and *perestroika* apart from Romania

Czechoslovakia
 Population: 15.5m
 GMP growth: 1987 2.0-2.5% 1988 2.2-2.8%

- 20th anniversary of the Prague Spring
- Some sign of economic reform

Hungary
 Population: 10.7m
 NMP per capita: £1,313
 NMP growth: 1987 1.7% 1988 1.2%

- Economy in serious difficulties, with large debts to the West
- Most liberal of the East European societies
- Kadar soon to retire, with Grosz, the PM, the most likely successor



Poland
 Population: 37.4m
 NMP per capita: £1,232
 NMP growth: 1987 3.2% 1988 3.2%

- Second stage of economic reform started in January
- Could see the most dramatic political reforms in Eastern Europe

Romania
 Population: 22.9m
 NMP growth: 1987 2.0-3.0% 1988 2.5-3.5%

- The most centralised and inflexible economy in Eastern Europe
- Very serious shortages
- Outlook for reform bleak

Bulgaria
 Population: 9.0m
 NMP growth: 1987 2.0-3.0% 1988 3.5%

- The USSR's most loyal East European ally
- Programme of economic restructuring

*Net Material Product approximates to Gross National Product less depreciation and the output of most services. GMP is Gross Material Product.

Sources: *The World in 1988*, The Economist Intelligence Unit; Janette Staubus; *The Europa Year Book 1987*.

of *glasnost*, published full details of the Nazi-Soviet pact, including the text of the infamous secret protocol providing for a Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland. But Gorbachev's much-heralded speech on the Stalin years, a few months ago, was strikingly cautious and defensive about the pact.

A visitor to the Soviet Union will be struck by the sharp limits to what is 'sayable', even in the new climate. One of these limits runs along the relationship, past and present, with the states of Eastern Europe. Many of the most outspoken Soviet journalists, who have burned their boats in commitments to *perestroika* at home, still justify without hesitation the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia, referring in the old manner to 'counter-revolutionary forces' financed by West German intelligence and the CIA.

'Gorbachev appears to want a stable, reasonably prosperous backyard, in which some political relaxation may be introduced'



Rather similar is the rarity of Soviet awareness that the essence of *perestroika* - the attempt to reform a socialist economy by relaxing central control and introducing market elements - has long been familiar in Eastern Europe, and that all its problems have been thoroughly explored and discussed there. Three such efforts - the ill-fated Czechoslovak reform of 1967-8, the Hungarian new economic model which has been running for 20 years, and the latest phase of the Polish reform programme - go far beyond the present Soviet programme in their radicalism. The lessons, especially the fundamental problem of the transitional period in which the job security and living standards of the working class may fall, have been exhaustively spelled out. Soviet commentators, however, too often write and speak as if the USSR under Gorbachev were breaking

entirely new ground.

To sum up, there is so far no sign whatever that the Gorbachev leadership contemplates a basic transformation of the Soviet relationship with the Warsaw Pact regimes. There is plainly a wish to stimulate change in a *perestroika* direction in the most ossified states, and - less plainly - a readiness to encourage the development of reforms like those in Hungary or Poland. For the moment, Mr Gorbachev appears to want a stable, reasonably prosperous backyard, in which - at the discretion of the ruling parties - some political relaxation may be introduced.

There can be no doubt that, as far as the West is concerned, by far the strongest Soviet credibility card would be a coherent drive to alter this relationship, and to foster the emergence of

internally autonomous and pluralistic political systems in Eastern Europe - the 'Finlandisation' dreamed of especially by the Poles. No evidence exists that the Gorbachev leadership contemplates anything of this kind.

Here we return to the notion of external policy as a function of internal policy. Such a transformation might be turbulent and uncontrollable, infecting national groups and perhaps workers within the USSR at a tricky moment, and offering the West levers with which to extort concessions from the Soviet Union in other fields. The recasting of the Soviet economy (and *glasnost* is, of course, a means to that, not an end in itself) requires a secure international environment, and also continuity in the supply of consumer goods and high-technology products from Eastern Europe.

That said, the huge changes taking place in the USSR have an important impact in Eastern Europe. Societies undertaking reform are given confidence, not least when they feel that they are advancing faster and further than the Soviet Union. Correspondingly, reformers in the more conservative states now enjoy the unexpected pleasure of being able to denounce their opponents for deviating from the Soviet model - a tactic which can be very effective.

With these excitements, however, goes a certain wariness. The Hungarians ask themselves whether a dynamic Soviet Union seeking to pump fresh life into organisations like the Warsaw Pact or Comecon is really in their interests. Their view is that renewed integration in the Soviet bloc could reduce their freedom of action and constrain their trading and financial relationship with the West. The 'period of stagnation' under Leonid Brezhnev was not without its advantages. In Poland, similarly, people have ambiguous feelings about a reform project next door which enhances the leading role of the party, which - as a 'revolution from above' - requires a greater concentration of central coercive power rather than a more open, relaxed and eclectic political system.

So far, then, the picture is of a careful and controlled encouragement of change and reform in Eastern Europe, but of nothing more. The signals in Moscow are that Soviet imagination of the tolerable still stops well before a society in which the Communist Party abandoned the conventional 'leading role', or effectively shared power with a 'non-socialist' force (although I suspect that events in Poland may challenge that imaginative limit again before too long). Alexander Dubcek, in his *Unita* interview, stated his belief that Gorbachev would never have authorised the 1968 military intervention in his country. For my part, I will wait and see for a few years before feeling able to agree with him.#

Neal Ascherson

Hungary And Czechoslovakia

Thousands of Hungarians celebrated the new year by storming their local police stations. But they went as they had come, in peace and clutching a document which most other East Europeans only dream about acquiring - a multi exit-and-entry passport valid for socialist and capitalist countries alike.

Just after the Hungarian government announced last year that it intended revolutionising its passport system in this way, thus affording citizens the basic human right to come and go through their own borders as they see fit, the Czechoslovak government also amended the Kafkaesque procedure which anyone who wishes to holiday in Eastern Europe must undergo.

Until January 1, Czechoslovaks had to apply to the state bank for the release of hard currency in order to travel. Roughly one in 30 of such applications were successful, so every year hundreds of thousands if not millions of holiday plans were scuppered. Now however, people can use their own dollar funds obtained from friends in the West and simply apply for a passport. Indeed the new system appears to take into account the fact that most people acquire their hard currency on the black market and not from great uncles in Canada.

Unlike their southern neighbours, however, the Czechs still have to collect the permission of their employer, their local government office, the army (if you are male) and their local party or youth organisation before the police will consider issuing a passport. Economic problems have been relieved slightly, but the authorities maintain a close watch on people.

It may seem paradoxical that of the two countries, Czechoslovakia makes a much greater effort to sing Gorbachev's praises. Initially, observers believed that Hungary, with its liberal economy and a relative ideological plurality, would become Gorbachev's favoured model in Eastern Europe.

When the Soviet leader visited Budapest in June 1986, he responded warmly to the achievements of Hungary's economic reform, which has been redrawing the boundaries of socialist economics since its inception in 1968. The Hungarians are now openly discussing the possibility that unemployment may be tolerated as a stimulus to production. Thus although Gorbachev cannot transfer the experience of a small-scale agricultural economy to his own country, he can observe the political and social effects of policies which are under consideration in the Soviet Union.

For two reasons, the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (HSWP) maintains a polite but respectful distance from Gorbachev. If they were to use his

approval as an excuse either to accelerate or to glorify their reform, then they would run the considerable risk of being left out on a limb in the event of the Soviet general secretary resigning or being toppled. For the market economics which characterise much of the Hungarian reform are regarded with suspicion by many conservatives in Moscow. Many Czechoslovak and East German party members are now gloating over Hungary's current economic difficulties. The Hungarian reform offends their statist conceptions.

But the HSWP must face up to the fact that the reform is running into serious trouble. Inflation hovers between 10-20% so the government has now taken the advice of those Budapest economists who fear that, unless tough measures are made to stick this year, inflation could spiral out of sight as it has done in Yugoslavia. The external debt stands at some \$14 billion, the highest per capita debt in Eastern Europe and a massive burden for Hungary's vulnerable economy. Although Gorbachev has often stressed how impressed he is by Hungarian economic imagination, both he and the HSWP know that the country's ailing approximation of a socialist market economy, with its creeping unemployment and widespread poverty, can hardly be presented to the Czechs or East Germans as a viable way forward.

The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz) introduced the words *glasnost* and *perestroika* into its vocabulary about six months after they had become popular in the Soviet Union. But these were dangerous concepts for the Husak leadership to play around with since it enjoyed very little popular legitimacy, deriving most of its power instead from the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU). Although Czechs and Slovaks remain deeply apathetic some 20 years after 1968, everyone knows that Husak, Jakes, Bilak *et al* owe their power exclusively to Soviet tanks.

This has ensured that the relationship between the CPSU and the fraternal party has a more profound effect on Czechoslovak politics than it has in Hungary. Many people assume that the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in the GDR can justify its rejection of *glasnost* purely because of its economic success. But the SED has also developed this relative autonomy because it is not bound to the CPSU by a traumatic experience like the Prague Spring.

So in 1986 Husak and the CPCz Presidium had to embrace the new line in the Soviet Union. Had they rejected it, they would have alienated their most important source of political legitimation. Since then the CPCz has had to discover a way of implementing *glasnost* while maintaining its strict ideological monopoly. So far the heart of the strategy has involved talking a great deal about the magic Russian word without actually doing anything about it, although this may change now that

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East Germany

Milos Jakes has replaced Husak as general secretary. But for the moment independent initiatives which claim inspiration from *glasnost* have been suppressed as energetically as ever.

The most significant of these was the recent publication by a small, but officially-recognised, ecological group in the Slovak capital. The document, called simply *Bratislava*, detailed the environmental catastrophe which threatens the city. Its authors were all interrogated, intimidated and 2000 copies of the booklet were confiscated. Since then it has emerged that the CPCZ's central committee has issued guidelines for all editors-in-chief of news publications explaining how they should explain *glasnost* to their readers. It is a monumental censorship operation.

The most articulate defender of the CPCZ's policy is Jan Fojtik, a candidate member of the presidium. In a fascinating interview on Hungarian television which was broadcast in the week when Husak stepped down, Fojtik outlined how his party interprets *glasnost*; 'Understandably, however, when it comes to the fundamental principles of our policies, there are certain limits. We have a clear policy; we are a socialist country; our CP has a comprehensive programme. *Glasnost* must therefore support the realisation of the programme.' For Fojtik, *glasnost* is not an innovative political instrument but one which is subordinate to a programme which has already been defined.

The searching questions of the Hungarian television presenter, who did not shy from some awkward questions about the human rights movement Charter 77, highlight the gap between straightforward repression in Czechoslovakia and the controlled plurality of Hungary.

Last October the new prime minister, Karoly Grosz, welcomed any contribution which dissidents might make to the solution of the country's serious difficulties. This was largely designed to please the Western press, but there is no doubt that by encouraging a more relaxed cultural atmosphere in Hungary, the HSWP has disarmed the opposition to an extent which is unthinkable in Czechoslovakia.

It is unlikely that Grosz, or his predecessor Gyorgy Lazar or indeed Kadar himself, would have made this gesture before Gorbachev came to power, but beyond that *glasnost* has made little impact in Hungary, because it merely confirmed an existing state of affairs.

Despite Gorbachev's accompanying rhetoric, *glasnost* in the Soviet Union has not resulted in any appreciable democratisation of society, but a substantial liberalisation. Hungary is no more democratic than Czechoslovakia or East Germany, but it is more liberal.

Although the liberal wind blowing in Moscow has caused some embarrassment to the CPCZ, it has not threatened

its position. Nonetheless it has provided the Czechoslovaks with a string of ironies which they revel in. A few years ago one of the CPCZ's slavish cultural acts was to erect booster stations all over the country so all its citizens could watch Soviet tv. This of course has now become Czechoslovaks' major source on *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, which is presented in a very selective fashion through the Czech mass media. Regardless of whether it leads to anything or not in their own country, Czechoslovaks are delighted by *glasnost*. *Moskovske Novosti* is currently the most oversubscribed foreign publication in Czechoslovakia.

But the feverish optimism, both in the West and in Czechoslovakia itself among ordinary people, that Gorbachev may provoke a second flowering of the Prague Spring is a dangerous illusion.

During his visit to Prague and Bratislava in April last year, Gorbachev said quite plainly that 1968 represented a chaotic state of affairs to which he hopes Czechoslovakia will not return. Soviet diplomats and journalists in Prague state in private conversation that they do not consider Dubcek and the rest of the leadership from 1968 to be a relevant part of today's political scenery. Since the Yeltsin affair the Soviet press has only published the most orthodox accounts of 1968.

There is no doubt that the Soviet Union looks to Eastern Europe for help and support in its attempts to modernise the economy. But as Gorbachev himself is involved in a gritty struggle for survival in the CPSU, the last thing he wants in Czechoslovakia is a chaotic and dramatic political development which could mobilise conservatives in his own party.

The Soviet leadership played a minor role in nominating Jakes as Husak's successor, but they hope that the new man will inject some spirit into the sclerotic organs of the CPCZ.

If results are anything to go by, Gorbachev appears content to see *glasnost* sacrificed in practice in Czechoslovakia, provided that Jakes makes a serious attempt to restructure the economy, which remains crassly over-centralised and sluggish but which nevertheless covers the basic social requirements of the population. It is significant that the recently-resolved leadership struggle was battled out within the framework of the presidium's deliberations on its 'Complex Plan for the Restructuring of the Czechoslovak Economy' - Czechoslovak *perestroika*. Jakes finally pushed through his conception, despite partial opposition from Husak among others.

There are no orders from Moscow anymore, only advice. Despite the dissimilarities between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, it is the same for both: if you keep your house in order then do what you like with politics, but get your economies sorted out. •

Misha Glennly

The GDR does things its way and, as if to reinforce its argument, it also appears to have the most successful economy in the whole of Comecon'



In October next year, the GDR will be 40 years old. It is fair to assume there will be much celebration and much to celebrate (not at all the same thing). If the last congress of the Socialist Unity Party in April 1986 is anything to go by, there will be almost no self-criticism. The country is run by an administration which, by its public utterances anyway, is very pleased with itself and its achievement.

This means that the leadership of Erich Honecker, who has been at the helm since 1971, also has very specific views on the nuances of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. In this area of debate, public utterances have been succinct and single-minded, even in the presence of Gorbachev himself as guest of honour. 'The development of productive forces and our socialist means of production,' the sprightly Honecker told congress, 'have enabled our people to reach a standard of living without precedent in their history. Unemployment is a concept from a different and alien world, while material comfort, a sense of security, full employment and equal educational opportunities for all children are a matter of course'.

Despite all sorts of disruptive efforts from the other side, he added, the cause of socialism was making great strides in the GDR. It is a tune which has not changed in the intervening months, in spite of the deluge of advice and inference that has come from the proponents of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The GDR, in a word, does things its way and, as if to reinforce its argument, it also appears to have the most successful economy in the whole of Comecon. National income went up by 4% in 1987.

According to the natural laws of ageing, Honecker, who will be 76 years old in August, must have entered the final phase of his leadership. He is abstemious in his habits, engaging determinedly in regular exercise and drinking almost no alcohol. He has also grown in stature with the job of party leader.

Invariably, when he talks of economic and social progress in the GDR, he measures it in terms of what has been achieved since he took over. The country is on a course, he argues, that should be continued; it has an efficient and functioning system of planning. The people, he claims, are involved in decision-making, and their views are listened to with the respect they deserve.

It is symptomatic that when he took over from the acerbic Walter Ulbricht he declined to be photographed, possibly out of consciousness of a faintly visible hair-lip. Today he appears to be one of Europe's most extrovert leaders, willing to make jokes and hob-nob with the most unlikely people, east or west. Certainly the curiosity to see him when

he was in the Federal Republic last year was genuine - and was reciprocated.

The GDR itself has gone through a comparable process. In the years before international diplomatic recognition was a fact of life, there was a certain stridency in the Berliner Luft, a self-consciousness and an uncompromising unwillingness to drop its guard, often overlaid with something not far removed from latent hostility. A sense of security, coupled with recent growth rates and improvements in living standards, as well as a clear willingness on the part of officials to talk, even to argue, with outsiders suggests a new maturity and an ability - almost - to relax. When the country is as easy to enter or leave as, say, Hungary, then the relaxation will be complete.

Supporters of *perestroika* and *glasnost* argue, with much justification, that such things are positively *necessary* in the Soviet Union today and that stagnation and obstructionism can no longer be afforded. The GDR has no stagnation problems if its figures are to be believed and obstructionism does not therefore arise. So far as *glasnost* is concerned, the leadership has more than once declared that criticism and self-criticism should be seen as 'indispensable' in the further shaping of the advanced socialist society.

The country's writers and artists clearly agree with such sentiments and have in recent months urged forcibly that they should be taken still further. Christa Wolf, for instance, is a writer of truly international standing and at last November's congress of the Writers' Union called for more honesty in dealing with 'a new type of thinking' and for a reappraisal of attitudes on the part of those writers who, for example, wanted nothing more to do with Wolf Bierman after the famous row of 1976.

A few weeks before the writers met, there had been a public debate on the Soviet anti-Stalin film, *Repentance*, which was shown on West German television during 1987 and therefore seen in four GDR households out of every five. It was conspicuously not shown in the recent 'Festival of Soviet Films in the GDR', though that may not have been the fault of the German organisers. Even so, the debate was colourful, centring on what *Neues Deutschland* described as the 'black' and 'nihilistic' nature of the film.

It was a sign perhaps that the GDR is not yet ready for a Gorbachev-style reassessment of Stalin. That presumably will come when the Ulbricht appointees in the country's leadership start to let go.

If there is a vulnerable aspect in official thinking, it lies in the attitudes taken towards young people. When, some months ago, young people gathered close to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin for a rock concert (being held on the western side of the wall), they finished marching on the Soviet

embassy in Unter den Linden, chanting in unison what they saw as the virtues of Gorbachev and his policies.

The first reaction of the GDR authorities was to deny that the demonstration had taken place at all - in contrast Soviet spokesmen in Moscow during the same period were apparently not averse to discussing the incident in some detail.

Inevitably the question arises as to who will succeed Honecker. It is a question which is not openly discussed - Honecker certainly seems at this moment to be in robust health - but which is apparently a source of heated debate behind the scenes.

Eight of the politburo are more than 70 years of age and, at the other (Gorbachev) end of the scale, 10 are still in their 50s. When he was in Berlin for the congress, Gorbachev was greeted by the politburo at Schoenefeld Airport and later made a point of talking in detail to each one of them in turn. There is no official way of knowing what was the nature of these exchanges, but the discreet fingers in the corridors of the central committee building are still generally believed to be pointing in the direction of Werner Felte, who was 60 last month, and Egon Krenz, who is 50.

The latter is currently party secretary for security matters and has a similar background to that of Honecker himself before he became party leader. Felte seems to have broader experience and is party secretary for agriculture. He has in recent weeks been making speeches on key issues, apparently speaking with the same sort of authority as Honecker himself or the 73-year old prime minister, Willi Stoph. •


Michael Simmons

Poland

Few observers of Poland's travails could have predicted that, just six years after imposing martial law, General Jaruzelski would be putting his credibility on the line in the most dramatic fashion possible. A relatively free referendum in a society still committed to the 'leading role of the party' was unusual enough. But the two questions posed in last November's referendum, to which people had to answer 'yes' or 'no', offered the most far-reaching economic reforms and deep-seated political democratisation yet to be encountered within Eastern Europe.

These reforms were only tangentially a by-product of events in the Soviet Union, possessing, as they did, their own internal dynamic. This was rooted in Jaruzelski's attempts to coax, cajole and convince a sullen Polish society that in losing Solidarity they did not also have to lose everything it had stood for. Coming after a whole retinue of consultative councils, revamped elections and sweeping amnesties, which

caught even their beneficiaries by surprise, the referendum was another example of a leadership reaching out to society but, as always, on its own terms,

ver the preceding years, this society had witnessed a plummeting standard of living for the bulk of its population, and greater social inequality in favour of those who could turn Poland's economic predicament to their own advantage. Martial law was as much associated with the 76% average price rises of 1982 as it was with internment, summary courts, repression and physical and social atomisation. Jaruzelski was initially more concerned, however, with fashioning a legal and political order which, whilst precluding the emergence of Solidarity-like phenomena, would nonetheless be seen to be addressing the symptoms which produced that unique social movement. By 1987, Poland's premier, Messner, was able to pronounce, 'You may now do anything except that which the law expressly forbids'.

In due course, Jaruzelski had to confront the burgeoning economic crisis with the same undoubted imagination that he had devoted to political normalisation. Developments in the Soviet Union and Hungary permitted him to propose reforms which, on the face of it, went even further than the USSR's *perestroika* or Hungary's new economic mechanism. New forms of private and co-operative property relations, mixed ventures with socialist and capitalist partners, competing banks, a free market in food and agricultural produce, and employee share ownership were just some of the proposals. The sting in the tail was the professed need for market equilibrium which would require enormous price-hikes for heating, lighting, transport, communal services and, most of all, food.

It was around the last question, of 110% food price rises, that the referendum came to focus. Most probably that reason more than any other made non-participation and even a 'no' vote more likely. Days before the poll, the shop shelves were emptied by panic buying. But where up to 70% of disposable income goes on food purchase (90% for pensioners and large families), and when 75-80% of Polish householders can satisfy only 'basic needs', and this in the context of a 10-hour working day for nearly half the working population, then the unsure benefits of market reform are easily discarded in the face of a collapse in the domestic budget. Underlying this was a basic mistrust in the ability of the state apparatus to reform itself without a societal guarantor such as Solidarity had represented.

Events in the Soviet Union, the ousting of Boris Yeltsin in particular, have been keenly watched by the Poles. But Ligachev's dismissal of the referendum as something that the Soviet leadership might use in pushing through its own difficult reform decisions demons-

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trates that Poland is allowed, and indeed is compelled, to follow its own path of reform. Entrusted as he is with the task of 'normalising' a society which had tasted more *glasnost* under Solidarity (and indeed continued to even after 1981) than any of its neighbours could ever hope to savour in the near future, Jaruzelski's reforms are nonetheless occurring within the limits and tasks set by the qualitatively new forms of economic, political and cultural co-operation with the USSR. Direct economic ties between factories, exchanges of workforces, and union and party cadres, as well as the proliferation of cultural exchanges and tourism, are all intended to put bilateral ties on a new sounder footing.

Bold as the referendum initiative may have been, it has imposed costs on the regime. On a reported 67% turnout, from an electorate of 26 m, only 46% or 12 m voted 'yes' and 23% or 6 m voted 'no' or had invalid ballots. This was insufficient to achieve the 51% majority that the referendum law required. The government thus failed in its stated objective. Yet the Solidarity underground, while questioning the 67% turnout figures, could not unequivocally claim the credit for the 33% or 8.5 m abstainers, since it had never unambiguously demanded a boycott from its supporters.

However, Polish society has undoubtedly become emboldened over the years following the trauma of a

self-imposed martial law. They have been helped in this by the fact that there is less and less to lose by openly dissenting. On current calculations, state-supplied housing has a waiting list of 20-50 years. The market in consumer durables such as colour tvs, fridges and freezers is, by the authorities' own admission, non-existent. Other incentives for displaying obedience are few and far between. Indeed the figures for enrolment in the 'new' trade unions, which have languished at seven million (out of a possible 12), and party membership, which has been static at two-thirds of its high reached in 1980, all indicate that indifference, coupled with a highly privatised view of life with a renewed emphasis on making money as opposed to careers, is the biggest obstacle to stimulating the social initiative needed if reforms are to work.

Whereas Jaruzelski can take some comfort from the 12 m or so persons who voted 'yes' to what inevitably came to be seen as his programme, he must still be cautious of what else lies behind the 'no' vote, apart from economic uncertainty and political disenchantment. Is it the dead-hand of the bureaucratic opposition who are opposed to economic reforms which undermine their power, or political reforms which dilute that power? 'Socialist pluralism' or 'coalitions', let alone the *nomenklatura* appointments having to compete for their manage-

ment positions with non-party nominees, is all too much for these traditional *apparatchiki*. They also look eagerly to the Soviet arena for signals that the reform current is weakening.

Perhaps the singularly most important outcome of this referendum is that the regime has demonstrated that it can lose without upheavals, rebellions or demonstrations ensuing. Possibly, just possibly, in the future a party candidate may lose an election to a non-party opponent and this will be judged as normal. Recently-announced election regulations regrettably don't go this far. But Solidarity is also finding itself increasingly pressured to confront the regime in elections, in self-management and trade union bodies, rather than continue a sterile boycott. There are voices talking of a new 'civil society' based on associations and groups with real autonomy emerging to complement the increasing areas of non-state economic activity.

Ever watchful of any organisation which might be a stalking horse for a renascent Solidarity, the government nevertheless recognises that economic problems often have political solutions, and nowhere more so than in contemporary Poland. We can expect more surprises from Poland, but probably none quite as show-stopping as the November referendum.

George Kolankiewicz

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