

sit and think out his ideas. Like all practical politicians he recognises the inevitability of compromise and looks on it not as a regrettable necessity but as a useful instrument to be wielded skilfully. Aneurin Bevan most astutely described Gomulka as a realist offsetting traditional Polish romanticism and he was dead right.

Guiding the effort to realise the aims outlined by him in his famous speech to the 8th Plenum of the Polish United Workers Party in October 1956 — when he was elected to First Secretaryship — Gomulka undoubtedly is prepared to use every move and manoeuvre in the political chess-game. Those aims achieved mean a 'renovated' Poland. A country standing on its own feet. A country no longer selected for honourable mention from abroad because of the willingness of its people to die on unsuccessful barricades every generation, but respected for the general well-being of its people. Tough, hard-headed, Gomulka reckons it's about time the Polish people sought a little of the esteem accorded to more material factors than a record of heroic self-sacrifice under oppression. Future higher living standards mean more to him than standing guard in the future over the graves of another army of Polish martyrs. Poland has all the martyrs one country can ever want.

But, of course, as a medium-sized, economically under-developed somewhat backward country Poland's future prosperity depends almost entirely on her external relationships. Noting the external obstacles to be overcome if Poland is to be 'renovated' internally Gomulka must surely have made something like the following appraisals:

- one, Poland is completely within the group of Communist-led countries and that is where it will remain;
- two, the Soviet leadership is antagonistic to the present Polish leadership, but Poland almost desperately needs Soviet aid economically, and militarily for the defence of its own Western frontiers;
- three, historically and geographically bound to the Soviet Union as Poland is, any ideas about fully solving its problems through support from the West are ultimately not practical, besides being undesirable from several viewpoints. Certainly Western aid must be sought and gratefully accepted where offered without strings but it cannot be seen even as a partial answer to the Soviet relationship. Anyway, to follow that line could result in 'Hungarian treatment' for Poland.
- four, the leaderships in other Communist-ruled countries are suspicious and antagonistic towards the Polish leadership, and nervous about what they might do. But Poland immediately requires improved economic relations with them, particularly with Czechoslovakia and East Germany. In perspective, too, Poland's national and social stability and security may demand that those countries move politically in its direction;
- five, the leaderships of some of the most powerful Communist Parties in capitalist countries distrust the Polish leadership

Gomulka's Poland.

A few months ago a well-informed Polish friend of mine turned on me with considerable passion when I expressed a morsel of doubt as to whether Gomulka was standing firm by the aims of the "October days." My friend said, "Don't you understand, Gomulka wants peace and quiet for this country. He knows that our people are dying for a stable, settled life, a little prosperity, a little comfort. These poor people have had enough of the other kind of life, Gomulka doesn't want to lead the world Communist movement. He doesn't want to be involved in ideological wrangles in or outside of Poland. He just wants to give our people security, harmony, a chance to build up our country."

I think that is the key to Gomulka's standpoint. Those who have seen him as the White Knight of Democratisation in the international Communist movement have romanticised him, and at the same time done him less than justice. Above all he is a practical politician, but with principles. However, being very experienced, astute, mature, his tactical moves are in no way hampered by an obsessive attitude to principle. He knows exactly what he wants for Poland and as has been noted, he ought to, since he had lots of time between 1950 and 1954 to

(e.g., the French Party) and there is a drive to isolate them as dangerously "right-deviationist." A hardening of that attitude within the international Communist movement could encourage the antagonisms towards Poland in the Communist-led countries, including the Soviet Union and China, to Poland's disadvantage.

Facing those problems related to Poland's vital external relations Gomulka, quite rightly made mocking fun of those foreign journalists who kept picturing him on a 'political tight-rope' between East and West. There is really no question of his skillfully balancing on a narrow line strung between two opposing camps. More accurately Poland's advance is figuratively along a broad highway fully set in one camp. The only trouble is that there are more than a few minefields, booby-traps and ambushes; their so-called neighbouring comrades have the Poles under constant survey and are doubtful as to whether they are friend or foe, and at a wrong (move on their part may turn the big guns on their land, and there is a very considerable 'trojan horse' in the Polish ranks. That is more accurately the 'Polish road' in international affairs. From, the very first moment of his return to leadership Gomulka expressed his determination not to tolerate any of these 'wrong moves' that could pointlessly increase doubts about Poland in its neighbours and create opportunities for the 'trojan horse.' He apparently sees the value of the differences which can cause bad relations as almost of no immediate importance as compared with the gains that can come through reasonably good relations "Gomulka wants peace and quiet for this country . . . a stable settled life, a little prosperity, a little comfort . . ."

Among internal political problems that directly relate to vital external relations are of course the various 'wings' and groupings within the United Workers Party and among the people. Take the 'trojan horse' grouping of die-hard 'conservatives.' Dogmatists in their thinking, sectarian in their practice, hating democratisation, many of them displaced members of the former Party administration — when the Party held all power — angry at being dispossessed of their power and privileges, of which few proved themselves worthy, and which some infamously abused, they are Stalinists who did well in the Stalinist days and (perhaps because of that) would like to have those times back again. They are not without strength in the Party middle leadership and administration and in some important institutions, and enjoy a degree of support from a far more extensive stratum of milder 'conservatives' among leading Party members. But they are generally unpopular, even detested, among the broader rank and file of the Party and the ordinary non-Party people. Although under pressure of events, and to avoid political isolation, perhaps even to keep their jobs, some of these 'conservatives' have modified their public utterances and have in some cases even come out as defenders of the 8th Plenum decisions — often their own version! — they remain the most organised opposition within the Party to the essential spirit of democratisation.

If there is an organised faction within the Party they are it. In his efforts to re-fashion the Party into a unified and harmonised instrument — the only possible instrument available ~ for driving forward and guiding the 'renovation' movement, Gomulka definitely meets the most determined resistance from these dogmatic-sectarian 'conservatives.' They are his number one internal political problem. And yet, paradoxically, when it comes to vital external relations they are not an embarrassment. They can be trusted not to say or do anything that, for example, would be offensive to the Soviet leadership, or to Ulbricht of East Germany. Mazur, a leading 'conservative' on the Central-Committee (he was removed from the Political Bureau when Gomulka became First Secretary) is now a well-placed Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, and his Military Attache is none other than Witaszewski, formerly Assistant Minister of Defence to Rokossowski and violently opposed to democratisation. On the other hand it is a different story with the so-called 'revisionists' within the Party and Poland. Among those there is no opposition to democratisation. There is generally devoted support of Gomulka, even if developments over the past months have shaken the original enthusiasm some of them held. And yet, regardless of their support for him, Gomulka has from the very outset of his return to leadership been most stern with them. Obviously, from the point of view of vital external relations he sees them as the dangerous element. They are the ones likely to make the 'wrong moves.'¹ Some of them have already made 'wrong moves' and created considerable annoyance. It was Lasota, one-time Editor-in-Chief of *Po Prostu*, the now banned student newspaper, and a Party Deputy to the Sejm (Parliament), who when he visited West Germany took part in a television discussion and made statements which proved most embarrassing not only to Polish East German relations but even upset the Yugoslavs. Then, particularly in the period of maximum freedom during 1957, when some of the most ardent supporters of democratisation and Gomulka got talking or writing there was little guarantee that they would not make statements that would cause angry raised eyebrows or worse in Moscow or some other capital city of a Communist-led country. Some of them either did not understand, or would not accept, the harsh realities of Poland's position in the world. When dealing with internal political, economic and social problems, in their zeal to profoundly 'renovate' all aspects of Polish life they tended further to disturb and agitate the already disturbed Polish community, and to deepen divisions within the Party . . . But as my friend said: "Gomulka wants peace and quiet for this country . . . doesn't want to lead the world Communist movement . . . doesn't want to be involved in ideological wrangles . . . just wants to give our people security, harmony, a chance to build up our country . . ."

The decision to ban *Po Prostu*, the student newspaper which played such a dynamic role in the struggle for democratisation, and helped pave the way for Gomulka's return to leadership, was one of the sharper expressions of the conflict between Gomulka and some of his

supporters. Undoubtedly the publication was a constant irritant to Party leaderships in other Communist-led countries and in some capitalist countries. That it was allowed to continue tended to confirm their distrust of the Polish leadership. Inside of Poland *Po Prostu* went on agitating, stirring up feelings, around political economic and social grievances. It carried articles disseminating every heretical idea known to Communism, many of them written by members of the editorial board as well as by contributors. For months 'conservatives' in the Party almost foamed at the mouth when they mentioned it, and openly criticised Gomulka for not having it banned. Following *Po Prostu* a large section of students persisted in their restless 'revolutionary' attitude. In fact *Po Prostu* did its utmost to destroy "peace and quiet," to create discord rather than harmony, by putting naked truth flagrantly before discretion. No fig leaves for them. Perhaps the main mistake of the *Po Prostu* editors, if they were mistaken, was that by persisting in their indiscretion to the utmost they made it impossible for themselves to remain in the field. Gomulka personally took the final decision that *Po Prostu* should be banned. He took the galley-proofs of the issue confiscated by the censors with him when he went to Yugoslavia, for the Yugoslav-Polish talks. When he got back to Warsaw his terse directive was "Ban *Po Prostu*," and no arguments. Rumour had it that Tito had urged Gomulka to bring the Polish press into line with the rather restricted Yugoslav Press. Possibly . . . and possibly Gomulka is mistaken in his attitude to *Po Prostu* and the Polish press . . . Perhaps he is wrong in attacking the 'revisionists' and categorising them as the main danger in Poland . . . But, this has to be said: by his consistent damping down policy he has disarmed some of those most antagonistic to the 'Polish road' and leadership in the international Communist movement; in the Polish Party he has reduced discord, and installed a new movement towards greater unity, a new steadiness; in the country he has brought about a gradual settling down . . . And the effort fully to realize the major decisions of the 8th Plenum goes on, the effort to establish Polish sovereignty (the Rapacki plan is one expression) to develop national independence, to 'renovate' the economic model, to re-create the democratic institutions. The Sejm (Parliament) from being almost a 'rubber stamp' is becoming a live, functioning, legislating body. The local governments (People's Councils) are in process of transformation into more genuinely democratic bodies. The trades unions are beginning tentatively to operate as organizations for the defence of the working-class, and Workers self-government councils are gradually beginning to play a part in industrial life. In the countryside there has been a minor revolution in terms of the farmers rebuilding farmsteads, bringing idle land into cultivation, getting down in a new way to food and crop production. On the very sensitive and dangerous religious front there is greater genuine harmony between Church and State than has ever previously existed. Expressions of discrimination by devout Catholics against non-believers, and antisemitic outrages, have diminished.

Plain common-sense, in place of a strange pseudo-Marxist cum neo-idealism, is everywhere to be observed disentangling the social and economic mess-ups left over from the 'past period.' That is all to the good. On the other hand the tentative nature of many changes, a certain apparent swing-back to some old restrictions on press and artistic freedom, suspected if not actual new threats to personal liberty, a new jauntiness among 'conservatives' since the banning of *Po Prostu* in Poland, and the Declaration of the twelve parties in Moscow (not to mention the Soviet sputnik), are causing a mood of mild disillusionment to creep through the ranks of some Poles who ardently supported democratisation. "Things are better — but not much," they say.

Gordon Cruickshank.
