

Destalinisation and European Security

K. A. JELENSKI

(Translated by Laidon Alexander)

Until recently the material which came into our hands about the Communist world was filtered through official propaganda and a totalitarian machine which postulated an identity between the *pays legal*—the state of affairs defined and described in the laws and constitutions—and the *pays reel*—the state of affairs which actually existed. Now this monolithic impression has been superseded by various different images. In Poland and Hungary we have, for the first time, caught a glimpse of what the *pays reel* is under Communism.

In Poland the Communist regime has accommodated itself to the demands of the nation. Without any constitutional guarantees, it nevertheless respects the liberties of its subjects to a very considerable extent. In Poland we can see the abundant complexity of a society which can study itself according to the methods of a de-mysticized marxism: a society in which the weight of historical facts replaced the imposed teleology of history: a society where the forces of tradition, no longer repressed, are to that extent the more capable of adjusting to the new society. Compromises and half-measures are, in the new Poland, presented as such: the facade of absolutism has been abandoned. The position is obscure only in the sense that every political situation is necessarily obscure and uncertain. It is true that Polish workers and intellectuals, in their courageous struggle in the last few years, had made it possible for us to catch a glimpse of certain hidden realities. But it is only since the Polish "October revolution" that it has been possible to follow the evolution of the *pays reel* step by step with the *pays legal*, with which it is, for the moment, closely bound up—though by no means identical.

Hungarian realities

In Hungary there has been no synchronisation between *pays reel* and *pays legal*—but we have now unlimited proof of the realities of

the Hungarian situation: the Kadar government rests very obviously on a total fiction, making not the slightest pretence that it is the representative of the Hungarian people. In the Hungarian tragedy the Soviet government for the first time has not provided any excuses for being taken in. In the past accusations and apologetics of the Soviet leaders were supported, like the rigged trials, with at least a show of facts—though the action might be the deportation of one people, or the extermination of another. Now, in Hungary, they have been faced with an anti-proletariat (in the sense that there was, in the later middle ages, an anti-pope). For the associations of the Hungarian workers and intellectuals have made it quite clear that they have nothing but contempt and hatred for the Russians and their puppets. This is the "proletariat" in whose name a dictatorship is re-imposed—a proletariat reduced to the level of a totem, deprived for the first time, of even the most tenuous links with flesh-and-blood workers.

The Polish paradox

The sacrifices of the Hungarian revolution have not been in vain. In Hungary, Kadar's puppet government has been compelled to adopt a programme which comes close to the initial demands of the revolutionaries themselves. In Poland, the Soviet government now realises that another repression on a national scale, involving this time a war with a secondary power which disposes of more than twenty divisions and produces eight MIGs a year, might develop into a world-wide conflict, and would finally destroy communist prestige in underdeveloped countries. We find ourselves faced here with an astonishing paradox. As long as Poland remains in the communist camp, as long as she refrains from asking for neutrality and free elections, her internal independence and her organic democratization may develop freely—and incident-

ally represent a terribly dangerous potential source of infection for the Soviet Union herself. Now, while indirectly denouncing the "dangers" of the Polish experiment (as Khrushchev did recently) the Russian rulers are at the same time forced to tolerate it, and even, on a different level, to approve of it, unless they are to see the breaches in the communist bloc irreparably widened. Nevertheless the "freedom" which Poland seems to enjoy should not be overstated, and is dependent on a favourable conjuncture of factors. It is only valid so long as the government is in the hands of Gomulka—that is, of a "national" Communist—and so long as the government is genuinely supported—as it was in the recent elections—by a majority of the population. To retain the support of a population which is 95% anti-Communist and anti-Soviet, while at the same time retaining an anchor in an ideology acceptable to the communist bloc: this is Gomulka's problem, if he wishes to avoid for Poland the fate of Hungary, or a Stalinist counter-revolution. For even if Russia tolerates the Polish experiment, she will not, naturally, contribute economically to its success to a greater extent than that which she has been compelled to concede to Gomulka. It is this precarious "margin" which must be constantly borne in mind when studying the Polish situation in all its finally revealed complexity and all its internal contrasts.

Poland's economic problems

In the economic sector it is necessary to distinguish between the programme of the Polish October revolution and the actual situation. Peter Wiles has, in a striking phrase, brought out the essentials: freed from a totalitarian economy, which often functions in a vacuum, and which looked forward to a mythical future, the Poles, like the Hungarians and the Yugoslavs, have discovered that men cannot work

except in a social system which they, as workers, prefer, and that this system may well be different in different occupations, and particularly as between industry and agriculture. Industry will remain nationalised, but the majority of decisions will be decentralised down to the level of the factory. It is hoped to create in this way almost independent industrial units which will have the flexibility but not the aggressiveness of those in the capitalist world: they themselves will decide their own levels of production and prices in a market which will become progressively more and more free. At the factory level the say of the workers' councils—impossible to deny after the role played by, for example, Zerán in the Polish October Revolution—will be considerable. In agriculture, on the other hand, forced collectivisation will be replaced by truly voluntary co-operation in certain fields, such as that of agricultural machinery. Crops will be sold on the free market and compulsory agricultural contributions will be abolished.

Conditional economic aid

Even if it is obvious that these are the beginnings of the future which is also undoubtedly in store for the Soviet Union, the difficulties of transition only exacerbate, for the time being, Poland's economic penury. The government is doing its utmost to obtain bread for the next few months without having to apply sanctions which would plunge the country back into the nightmare of the Stalinist past. It is certain that the Moscow economic agreements represent a considerable success for the Gomulka government—though the generosity of the Russians was not in fact excessive. Poland cannot hope for any better from the Soviet Union. Can she count on help from the West—which is to say under the circumstances, the United States? According to reports which have appeared in the Western press the Polish authorities estimate the aid which would assure an easy economic recovery at \$400 million. Even though this sum might appear enormous to Congress, it is nevertheless very much less than those which have been granted to certain European countries within the framework of the Marshall plan. If the West does

not grant Poland substantial and conditional economic aid, and if in the next few months Polish peasants and workers find themselves threatened by famine, it is very possible that the relative independence enjoyed by Gomulka's Poland could be lost even without revolution which had to be crushed by Russian tanks*.

The 'Natolin' threat

There is another danger, if the Polish economy collapses under the Gomulka government. It must not be forgotten that, in the P.U.W.P. Central Committee, the really Machievellian group was that of the Polish Stalinists, the Natolin group.

After its resounding defeat in the course of the critical October days the Natolin group has been quick to take a hair of the dog that bit it. The Polish revolution was radical enough to pose the eternal problem of a privileged class which has been deposed. In Poland there is now a whole class of fallen bureaucrats, deprived overnight of power, rank, living quarters, cars and secretaries. Polish history witnesses to the dangers of the intrigues of social groups bound by material interests to Russia. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, some great lords, associated in the Confederation of Targowica, and alarmed by the wave of reforms which was to lead to the constitution of the 3rd May, 1791, precipitated the partition of Poland by offering their services to Catherine the Great. Of the former Stalinist leadership, only a few scattered secret police thugs, such as Rozanski, have been imprisoned. Others have lost their posts. But there are still others who have, naturally, remained in their positions in the Ministries and factories. Among these last, who still enjoy a very real influence, the Natolin group is doing its best to set up a network, whose programme of action seems already fully mapped out: to foster discontent, taking advantage of the economic crisis; to recall their own promises of a major increase in the standard of living; to undermine confidence in the present rulers by bringing out their "Stalinist" past; to play on the anti-semitism which is so deeply rooted in the Poles, aiming particularly against intellectuals and freedom-fighters of Jewish extraction, who,

like the Warsaw secretary Staszewski, were in the vanguard of the anti-Stalinist struggle in Poland.

It is naturally easy in Poland, as in Hungary, to accuse those Communists who only broke with the party line between 1949 and 1956 of Stalinism. A striking example of this was provided by the discussion in the heart of the Warsaw committee, where feeling was stirred up against the Committee Secretary, Staszewski, who bore credit for the success of the "October Revolution". Overnight, this man, who organized the alarm signal for the population of Warsaw, who distributed arms to the workers councils, who provided a bodyguard for Gomulka before the Central Committee meeting (when he was elected First Secretary), was accused of being a Stalinist, a "mandarin" and a bureaucrat, and only Gomulka's personal intervention saved him from ruin. Already, moreover, a whispering campaign has been initiated against Gomulka himself with regard to his responsibilities for the Stalinist take-over in Poland, which, however, is having little effect for the moment, thanks to his national prestige.

Anti-Semitism should have been compromised, merely by the fact of its inclusion in the Stalinist programme, and by the rumour, which it is difficult to check on, but is very widespread in Poland, that it was directly inspired by Khrushchev. This was the one seed planted by the Soviet Stalinists which found in Poland a traditionally fertile soil. It is frightening, in any case, to see that one of the big student organisations which has been formed since Gomulka's advent to power, which has called itself "Revolutionary Youth"(!) wished to include in its constitution the sinister *numerus clausus* for Jewish students.

Polish alternatives

There is only a superficial paradox in the fact that Soviet imperialism could re-establish its hold on Eastern Europe by basing itself on chauvinist and ultra-nationalist elements, hankering after totalitarianism. It was no gratuitous play on words that led the Poles to call the Natolin group "reactionary" and Gomulka's supporters "revolutionary democrats". For there can be no question, whether in Poland or in

De-Stalinisation and European security

Hungary, of a return to a neo-Stalinism which would imply a total fiction of existence. The issue remains to be decided only between an autonomous democratic development, which might not necessarily lead to a Western-type liberal democracy, and a limited nationalist regime which would retain several Communist slogans while in fact remaining essentially closer to a Balkan quasi-dictatorship.

However, barring a disastrous economic crisis, which it is the West's duty to prevent, or a Russo-Polish war, which is improbable, the Gomulka experiment carries more promise of success than one would have guessed immediately after the Soviet aggression in Hungary. At that moment of extreme danger, Poland was able to preserve both elementary prudence in her votes at the United Nations, and, through her uninterrupted development and internal judgement on the Hungarian tragedy, her new-found freedom of expression and her moral dignity.

National unity

Two phenomena are, in a political sense, the keystones of this new structure. First of all, the phenomenon of national unity, which is genuine, and constitutes an exact counterpoint to the "National Fronts" set up again and again by the Stalinists. In fact, in every sector, it constitutes a national revival. Instead of the Catholic puppets of *Pax* it is the entire Catholic hierarchy which is collaborating in the success of the regime. The Social Democrats, who even yesterday were represented by a few men terrified by their own past, and included in the "United Party", are now discovering that socialist ideas are not only alive among the workers, but that they seem to be reappearing spontaneously among numerous young intellectuals brought up under Communism. And as for the peasants, Gomulka himself, in his speech to the Central Committee, claim for them the right to a genuine political representation in place of the pseudo-Peasant party.

Most important of all, perhaps is the internal democratization of the Communist Party and the organisation to which it gave rise. A Party, like the Polish Party, which is the only autonomous Party in the coun-

try, and which has a million and a half members, is extremely heterogeneous and is, taken as a whole, a microcosm of the political opinions of the Poles. Certainly, this is not a liberal democracy, but if democratic rules governed this single Party's internal life, Poland would resemble England or France as they were in the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century, when the number of electors and candidates was limited for economic reasons, while at the same time allowing a free democratic play within the limits of this minority.

The Party's dogmatic approach to literature, art, science, and all the fields over which the intellect presides has definitely been abolished. Even before Gomulka came to power, Leszek Kolakowski was explaining in last September's issue of *Nowe Drogi*, the Party's theoretical review, that since Marxism is truth, to which human reason will always automatically be led, the most untrammelled intellectual freedom could do it no harm. A more respectful way of putting a system of dogma on the shelf could hardly be imagined. No less has been the change in the mass organisations connected with the P.U.W.P. During the Eighth Plenum meeting of the Central Committee, a decision was made to summon, within a fortnight, a conference of the Union in order to proceed to new elections. According to conditional reflexes a new managing bureau was prepared consisting of Gomulka supporters whom it was intended to propose "to the delegates". Now, in the meanwhile the factory committees proceeded to elect delegates and, at the Trades Union Conference, one was confronted by* a thousand odd duly elected representatives who demanded first of all the election of a Conference Praesidium, in order thereafter to go on to a completely democratic election of candidates to the managing bureau.

Hungary: fact or fiction

Here, then, are quite a number of trump cards for a novel socialist and democratic experiment, relieved of its religious character, which may, in many ways, prefigure the future development of a large part of the globe.

From a distance, what seems most striking in the Hungarian

scene is that even after suppressing the revolt by bloody force, and in so doing incurring the opprobrium of the whole world, even after installing Kadar's puppet government, the Russians have not managed to get the version of events which they have tried to pass off abroad officially accepted in Hungary itself. The Workers' Councils up to 10 December, and the Writers' Union until an even later date, have acted in a manner and published declarations in a sense directly contrary to the official Soviet story. In the Baltic states immediately after their incorporation into the Soviet Union, all the social organisations were obliged to issue declarations of gratitude and homage to Stalin. Little matter than these organisations were fictitious *ad hoc* creatures. There was no doubt about what the popular feeling was there, either. But in that case, nothing reached the papers, and an impenetrable barrier was set up overnight between reality and the official fiction. In Hungary, on the other hand there is a continual diffusion between the two. The Writers' Union, in a public declaration which has been published, supports the principles of the Revolution and calls the Soviet Intervention a "grave historical mistake". The Central Workers' Council openly declared a strike "in order to protest against the anti-popular and anti-worker attitude of the Kadar government supported by the Soviet Union". Even its dissolution did not stop the strikes: it is well known that it has been directing them, operating clandestinely. And the factory workers' councils which are still in existence, are still taking up political positions, despite the Kadar government prohibition. It is abundantly clear that the Hungarians have remained devoted to the aims of their Revolution, that they are against the Russian occupation and the Kadar government. This is a new sort of phenomenon in side the Communist world, and of the utmost importance. The fact is that in Hungary, as in Poland, men are no longer afraid. The omnipresent secret police, the spying neighbour, distrust even of one's own family—all these belong to the past.

Like a psychosis from which whole nations suddenly feel themselves freed, it seems, today, incomprehensible that they ever existed. If she could have Hungary docile

and malleable, the Soviet Union would be prepared to make numerous economic and political concessions. But can Hungary become docile, now that the Hungarians have decided, once and for all, apparently, to live in truth?

European security

What can the West do to help Poland to persevere in this path, and, even more, to ensure that the shall note be in vain?

One of the principal aims of the sacrifice of the Hungarian people Hungarian revolution was neutrality. Such a neutrality would be unacceptable to the Soviet Union without some return; but could it not be achieved in the larger framework of a general neutralisation of Germany and Eastern and Central Europe? Such a solution could certainly be enthusiastically greeted by the Poles. Recent articles in *Tribunu Ludu*, the official Party newspaper, state that if the Russian alliance must remain the basis of Polish foreign policy, this cannot be "identical" with Russian policy. The in-

clinations expressed by *Tribunu Ludu* for creating a zone of limited armies and armaments in Central Europe correspond to the deeply felt desire of all Poles to defend their freedom through the neutralisation of Europe. The Oder-Neisse frontier which is only guaranteed by Moscow, is the last link on the international level between Poland and the Soviet Union. For the Western powers to guarantee this frontier would risk rendering valueless in the eyes of the Polish public all the arguments of *raison d'etat* for Poland remaining in the Soviet bloc. To recognise the Oder-Neisse frontier without at the same time raising the question of partial European neutralisation and unification of Germany, on the other hand, would be to risk binding Poland, reluctantly, to the Soviet bloc.

It is being said in the West that it is less probable than ever, after the Hungarian revolution, that the Russians should accept a neutralisation plan in which the withdrawal of their armed forces from the satellite states would be compensated by a withdrawal of Western

forces from Germany. But with the satellites on their way to becoming a burden to the Soviet Union—militarily, economically and politically—through the danger of contagion of the Gomulka experiment—one may wonder whether the Soviet Union would not accept a solution which would allow her, in exchange for compensations on the security level, to withdraw from her bastion.

It is certain that the West's lack of a precise political line with regard to Central and Eastern Europe is a major trump-card in the hands of Soviet imperialism. If the reunification and neutralisation of Germany and the neutralisation of Central and Eastern Europe were accepted by the Soviet Union, Poland could freely continue with her experiment, thousands of young Hungarians would not have died in vain, and a rejuvenated Europe would assume a more important weight in world affairs. If Russia rejects such a proposition, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe would know, at least, that the West had done every, thing in its power to liberate them.