

= History of Poland (1945 ? 89) =

The history of Poland from 1945 to 1989 spans the period of Soviet communist dominance imposed after the end of World War II over what had become the Polish People 's Republic . These years , while featuring general industrialization and urbanization and many improvements in the standard of living in Poland , were marred by social unrest and severe economic difficulties .

Near the end of World War II , the advancing Soviet Red Army pushed out the Nazi German forces from occupied Poland . In February 1945 , the Yalta Conference sanctioned the formation of a provisional government of Poland from a compromise coalition , until postwar elections . Joseph Stalin , the leader of the Soviet Union , manipulated the implementation of that ruling . A practically communist @-@ controlled Provisional Government of National Unity was formed in Warsaw by ignoring the Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile based in London since 1940 .

During the subsequent Potsdam Conference in July ? August 1945 , the three major allied powers ratified the colossal westerly shift of Polish borders and approved its new territory between the Oder ? Neisse line and Curzon Line . Caused by the events of World War II , for the first time in its history Poland became an ethnically homogeneous nation @-@ state without prominent minorities . The new population pattern was a result of the destruction of indigenous Polish @-@ Jewish population in the Holocaust , the flight and expulsion of Germans in the west , resettlement of Ukrainians in the east , and the repatriation of Poles from Kresy . The new government solidified its political power over the next two years , while the communist Polish United Workers ' Party (PZPR) under Bolesław Bierut gained firm control over the country , which would become part of the postwar Soviet sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe .

Following Stalin 's death in 1953 , a political " thaw " in the Soviet sphere allowed a more liberal faction of the Polish communists , led by Władysław Gomułka , to gain power . By the mid @-@ 1960s , Poland began experiencing increasing economic , as well as political , difficulties . They culminated in the March 1968 political crisis and in December 1970 , when a consumer price hike led to a wave of strikes . The government introduced a new economic program based on large @-@ scale borrowing from the West , which resulted in a rise in living standards and expectations , but the program meant growing integration of Poland 's economy with the world economy and it faltered after the 1973 oil crisis . In 1976 , the government of Edward Gierek was forced to raise prices again , and this led to another wave of public protests .

This vicious cycle of repression and reform and the economic @-@ political struggle acquired new characteristics with the 1978 election of Karol Wojtyła as Pope John Paul II . Wojtyła 's unexpected elevation strengthened the opposition to the authoritarian and ineffective system of nomenklatura @-@ run state socialism , especially with the pope 's first visit to Poland in 1979 . In early August 1980 , a new wave of strikes resulted in the founding of the independent trade union " Solidarity " (Polish Solidarność) led by electrician Lech Wałęsa . The growing strength and activity of the opposition caused the government of Wojciech Jaruzelski to declare martial law in December 1981 . However , with the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union , increasing pressure from the West , and dysfunctional economy , the regime was forced to negotiate with its opponents . The 1989 Round Table Talks led to Solidarity 's participation in the 1989 election ; its candidates ' striking victory gave rise to the first of the succession of transitions from communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe . In 1990 , Jaruzelski resigned from the presidency of the Republic of Poland and , after the December 1990 elections , was succeeded by Wałęsa .

= = Creation of the Polish People 's Republic (1944 ? 48) = =

= = = Wartime devastation , border and population shifts = = =

Before World War II , a third of Poland 's population was composed of ethnic minorities . Poland had about 35 million inhabitants in 1939 , but fewer than 24 million in 1946 , within the respective borders . Of the remaining population over three million were ethnic minorities , such as Germans ,

Ukrainians and Jews , most of whom would soon leave Poland . Poland suffered the heaviest proportionate human losses during World War II , amounting to 16 ? 17 percent of its population . It is estimated that up to 6 million Polish citizens died from war @-@ related causes between 1939 and 1945 . The approximate figure includes 3 million Jewish @-@ Polish victims as part of the above total . The number of ethnically Polish victims was perhaps 2 million .

The historical minorities in Poland were most significantly affected , whereas Poland 's multiethnic diversity reflected in prior national censuses was all but gone within several years after the war . The Polish educated class suffered greatly . A large proportion of the country 's pre @-@ war social and political elite perished and a large proportion were dispersed .

Poland suffered catastrophic damage to its infrastructure during the war , which caused it to lag even further behind the West in its industrial output . The losses in national resources and infrastructure amounted to over 30 % of the pre @-@ war potential . Poland 's capital of Warsaw was among the most devastated cities ? over 80 percent destroyed in the aftermath of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 . Nonetheless , resulting from forced migration , there was a rapid increase in population to 23 @.@ 9 million shown in the first post @-@ war census of 14 February 1946 . The Polish state acquired more highly developed western territories and lost the more economically backward eastern regions . Already in 1948 the prewar level of industrial production was exceeded in global and per capita terms during the first Three @-@ Year Plan (Plan Trzyletni) fueled by the collective desire to rebuild shattered lives .

The implementation of the immense task of reconstructing the country was accompanied by the struggle of the new government to acquire centralized authority , further complicated by the mistrust a considerable part of society held for the new regime and by disputes over Poland 's postwar borders , which were not firmly established until mid @-@ 1945 . In 1947 Soviet pressure caused the Polish government to reject the American @-@ sponsored Marshall Plan , and to join the Soviet Union @-@ dominated Comecon in 1949 . The Soviet forces present engaged in plunder of the former eastern territories of Germany which were being transferred to Poland , stripping it of valuable industrial equipment , infrastructure and factories and sending them to the Soviet Union .

After the Soviet annexation of the Kresy territories east of the Curzon line , about 2 million Poles were " repatriated " (moved or were transferred or expelled) from these areas into the new western and northern territories east of the Oder @-@ Neisse line , which were transferred from Germany to Poland under the Potsdam Agreement . Others stayed in what had become the Soviet Union and more went to Poland after 1956 . Additional settlement with people from central parts of Poland brought the number of Poles in what the government called the Recovered Territories up to 5 million by 1950 . The former German population of 10 million had fled or was expelled to post @-@ war Germany by 1950 , of which 5 million were involved in involuntary transfers in the " Polish part of the operation " . The expulsion of the Germans was the result of the Allied decisions finalized in Potsdam .

With the repatriation of Ukrainians from Poland to the Soviet Union and the 1947 Operation Vistula dispersing the remaining Ukrainian minority , and with most of the former Jewish minority exterminated by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust and many of the survivors emigrating to the West and to newly created Israel , Poland for the first time became an ethnically homogeneous nation state . The government @-@ imposed and spontaneous movements of people amounted to one of the greatest demographic upheavals in European history .

Warsaw and other ruined cities were cleared of rubble ? mainly by hand ? and rebuilt with great speed (one of the successes of the Three @-@ Year Plan) at the expense of former German cities like Wroc?aw , which often provided the needed construction material . Wroc?aw , Gda?sk , Szczecin and other formerly German cities were also completely rebuilt .

Historian Norman Davies found the new Polish frontiers , from the Polish interests point of view , entirely advantageous , but realized at the cost of enormous suffering and specious justifications . The radically new Eastern European borders constituted a " colossal feat of political engineering " , but could not be derived from immemorial historical determinations , as claimed by the communist propaganda .

The Regained Territories Exhibition (Polish : Wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych) , a propaganda

exhibition celebrating " the restoration of the Recovered Territories to Poland " after the end of Second World War , was opened on 21 July 1948 by Bolesław Bierut and lasted for 100 days . About 2 million people visited the exhibition and the Iglica monument was built in front of the Centennial Hall in Wrocław .

= = = Consolidation of communist power = = =

Even before the Red Army entered Poland , the Soviet Union was pursuing a deliberate strategy to eliminate anti-communist resistance forces to ensure that Poland would fall under its sphere of influence . In 1943 , following the revelation of the Katyn massacre , Stalin severed relations with the Polish government-in-exile in London . However , to appease the United States and the United Kingdom , the Soviet Union agreed at the February 1945 Yalta Conference to allow the formation of a coalition government composed of the communists , including the Polish Workers ' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza ; PPR) , as well as pro-Western elements in exile and in Poland , and subsequently to arrange for free elections to be held .

After the prewar Communist Party of Poland was eliminated in Stalin 's purges in 1938 (some five thousand Polish communists were brought to Russia and killed) , a group of survivors , led by Marcei Nowotko , Bolesław Możejca and Paweł FINDER , convinced in 1941 the Soviets in Moscow of the need to reestablish a Polish party . The conspiratorial core of the new Polish Workers ' Party was assembled in Warsaw in January 1942 , and after the deaths or arrests of the above leaders there , Władysław Gomułka emerged as the PPR 's First Secretary by the end of 1943 . Gomułka was a dedicated communist in the national tradition of the Polish leftist movement , who loathed the Soviet practices he experienced while being trained in Russia and Ukraine in the 1930s , but was convinced of the historic necessity of alliance with the Soviet Union . He may have survived the purges because of being imprisoned in Poland for illegal labor-organizing activities in 1938-39 . Throughout the German occupation , Gomułka remained in Poland and was not a part of the Moscow-reared Stalin 's Polish circle . In Polish society of 1945 , Gomułka 's party was marginally small in comparison to other political groups .

With the beginning of the liberation of Polish territories and the failure of the Armia Krajowa 's Operation Tempest in 1944 , control over Polish territories passed from the occupying forces of Nazi Germany to the Red Army , and from the Red Army to the Polish communists , formally led by their Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego ; PKWN) , an early government , from late July 1944 in existence in Lublin . The Polish communists became the most influential Polish factor in the politics of emerging Poland , despite having minuscule popular support . PKWN recognized the legal continuity of the March Constitution of Poland , as opposed to the April Constitution . On September 6 , PKWN issued its momentous land reform decree , the consequences of which would fundamentally alter the antiquated social and economic structure of the country . Over one million peasant families benefited from the parceling of the larger estates .

Thus from its outset , the Yalta decision favored the communists , who enjoyed the advantages of Soviet support within the Soviet plan of bringing Eastern Europe securely under the influence of the Soviet Union , as well as control over crucial government departments such as the security services (this activity was initially dominated by Lavrentiy Beria 's Soviet NKVD) . Beginning in the later part of 1944 , following the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising and the promotion of the populist program of the PKWN , the London exiled government 's delegation was increasingly seen by the majority of Poles as a failed enterprise , its political-military organizations became isolated , and the resistance against the new communist political and administrative forces decisively weakened . The population was tired of the years of oppression and conflict and the ideas expressed in the PKWN Manifesto and their progressive implementation attracted widening social support . From 1944 in liberated areas , responding to promulgated slogans , workers spontaneously took over existing factory installations , established workers ' councils , undertook reconstruction , activation and production . A considerable labor struggle and compulsion were necessary for the PPR to claim the factories and enforce its own rules .

The PKWN was reshaped into the Provisional Government (Rzeczpospolita Tymczasowa Rzeczypospolitej

Polskiej ; RTRP) , which functioned from January 1945 . This government was headed by Edward Osóbka @-@ Morawski , a socialist , but the communists , mostly non @-@ PPR Soviet employees , such as Micha? Rola @-@ ?ymierski , held a majority of key posts . In April 1945 , a Polish @-@ Soviet treaty of friendship and cooperation was signed ; it severely limited the possibilities of future Western or émigré impact or internal cooperation with non @-@ communist political forces in Poland . The consecutive early Soviet @-@ influenced governments were subordinate to the unelected , communist @-@ controlled parliament , the State National Council (Krajowa Rada Narodowa ; KRN) , formed by Gomu?ka and his PPR in occupied Warsaw in January 1944 . The communist governmental structures were not recognized by the increasingly isolated Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile , which had formed its own quasi @-@ parliament , the Council of National Unity (Rada Jedno?ci Narodowej ; RJN) .

The Yalta agreement stipulated a governmental union in Poland of " all democratic and anti @-@ Nazi elements " . The prime minister of the Polish government @-@ in @-@ exile , Stanis?aw Miko?ajczyk , resigned his post in 1944 , and having accepted the Yalta terms went to Moscow , where he negotiated with Bierut the shape of a " national unity " government " . Miko?ajczyk , along with several other exiled Polish leaders , returned to Poland in July 1945 .

The new Polish Provisional Government of National Unity (Tymczasowy Rz?d Jedno?ci Narodowej ; TRJN) ? as the Polish government was called until the elections of 1947 ? was established on 28 June 1945 . Osóbka @-@ Morawski was kept as prime minister , Gomu?ka became first deputy prime minister and Miko?ajczyk second deputy and minister of agriculture . The government was " provisional " and the Potsdam Conference soon declared that before a regular government is created , free elections must be held and a permanent constitutional system established .

The communists ' principal rivals were the veterans of the Armia Krajowa movement , Miko?ajczyk 's Polish People 's (Peasant) Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe ; PSL) , and the veterans of the Polish armies which had fought in the West . Of particular practical importance was Miko?ajczyk 's People 's Party , because it was legally recognized by the communists and thus able to function within the political arena . The People 's Party wanted to prevent the communists from monopolizing power and eventually establish a parliamentary polity with a market economy by winning the promised elections . Miko?ajczyk hoped that an independent Polish state , friendly with the Soviet Union , would be allowed to act as a bridge between the east and the west .

Soviet @-@ oriented parties , backed by the Soviet Red Army and in control of the security forces , held most of the power , concentrated especially in the Polish Workers ' Party under W?adys?aw Gomu?ka and Boles?aw Bierut . Bierut represented the influx of appointees to the Polish party coming (during and after the war) from the Soviet Union and imposed by the Soviets , a process accelerated at the time of the PPR Congress of December 1945 . The Party 's membership dramatically increased from perhaps a few thousand in early 1945 to over one million in 1948 .

As a show of communist rule and Soviet domination , sixteen prominent leaders of the Polish anti @-@ Nazi underground were brought to trial in Moscow in June 1945 . Their removal from the political scene precluded the possibility of a democratic transition called for by the Yalta agreements . The trial of the defendants , falsely and absurdly accused of collaboration with the Nazis , was watched by British and American diplomats without protest . The absence of the expected death sentences was their relief . The exiled government in London , after Miko?ajczyk 's resignation led by Tomasz Arciszewski , ceased to be officially recognized by Great Britain and the United States on 5 July 1945 .

In the years 1945 ? 47 , about 500 @,@ 000 Soviet soldiers were stationed in Poland . Between 1945 and 1948 , some 150 @,@ 000 Poles were imprisoned by the Soviet authorities . Many former Home Army members were apprehended and executed . During the PPR Central Committee Plenum of May 1945 , Gomu?ka complained that the Polish masses regard the Polish communists as the " NKVD 's worst agency " and Edward Ochab declared the withdrawal of the Soviet Army from Poland a high priority . But in the meantime tens of thousands of Poles died in the postwar struggle and persecution and tens of thousands were sentenced by courts on fabricated and arbitrary charges or deported to the Soviet Union . The status of Soviet troops in Poland was not legalized until late 1956 , when the Polish @-@ Soviet declaration " On the legal status of Soviet

forces temporarily stationed in Poland " was signed . The Soviet Northern Group of Forces would be permanently stationed in Poland .

= = = Rigged elections , defeat of Mikołajczyk = = =

Stalin had promised at the Yalta Conference that free elections would be held in Poland . However , the Polish communists , led by Gomułka and Bierut , while having no intention of giving up power , were also aware of the limited support they enjoyed among the general population . To circumvent this difficulty , in 1946 a national plebiscite , known as the " 3 times YES " referendum (3 razy TAK ; 3 × TAK) , was held first , before the parliamentary elections . The referendum comprised three fairly general , but politically charged questions about the Senate , national industries and western borders . It was meant to check and promote the popularity of communist initiatives in Poland . Since most of the important parties at the time were leftist or centrist ? and could have easily approved all three options ? Mikołajczyk 's Polish People 's Party (PSL) decided , not to be seen as merging into the " Government Bloc " , to ask its supporters to oppose one of them : the abolition of the Senate . The communists voted " 3 times YES " . The partial results , reconstructed by the PSL , showed that the communist side was met with little support ; in Kraków where the actual ballots were counted , only 16 % of the population voted in favor of their proposed Option One . However , the large @-@ scale electoral fraud and intimidation won the communists a claimed majority of 68 % in the carefully controlled poll , which led to the nationalization of industry and state control of economic activity in general , land reform , and a unicameral national parliament (Sejm) .

The communists consolidated power by gradually whittling away the rights of their non @-@ communist foes , particularly by suppressing the leading opposition party ? Mikołajczyk 's PSL . In some widely publicized cases , the perceived enemies were being sentenced to death on trumped up charges ? among them Witold Pilecki , the organizer of the Auschwitz resistance , and numerous leaders of Armia Krajowa and the Council of National Unity . Many resistance fighters were murdered extrajudicially , or forced to exile . The opposition members were also persecuted by administrative means . Although the ongoing persecution of the former anti @-@ Nazi and right @-@ wing organizations by state security kept some partisans in the forests , the actions of the Ministry of Public Security of Poland (UB , Polish secret police) , NKVD and the Red Army steadily diminished their numbers . The right @-@ wing insurgency radically decreased after the amnesty of July 1945 and faded after the amnesty of February 1947 .

By 1946 , all rightist parties had been outlawed , and a new pro @-@ government Democratic Bloc was formed in 1947 which included only the Polish Workers ' Party and its leftist allies . On 19 January 1947 , the first parliamentary elections took place featuring primarily PPR and allied candidates and a potentially politically potent opposition from the Polish People 's Party , whose strength and role had already been seriously compromised due to government control and persecution . Results were adjusted by Stalin himself to suit the communists , whose bloc claimed 80 % of the votes . The British and American governments protested the poll for its blatant violations of the Yalta and Potsdam accords . The rigged elections effectively ended the multiparty system in Poland 's politics . After the referendum dress rehearsal , the vote fraud was much better concealed and spread into various forms and stages and its actual scale is not known . With all the pressure and manipulations , a NKVD colonel charged with the election supervision reported to Stalin that about 50 % of the vote was cast for the regime 's Democratic Bloc nationwide . In the new Sejm , out of 444 seats , 27 were given to Mikołajczyk 's party . Stanisław Mikołajczyk , who declared the results to be falsified and was threatened with arrest or worse , fled the country and other opposition leaders also left . Western governments did not act further and the Poles felt abandoned again . In the same year , the new Sejm created the Small Constitution of 1947 . Over the next two years , the communists monopolized their political power in Poland .

= = = Polish United Workers ' Party and its rule = = =

Additional force in Polish politics , the long @-@ established Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia

Socjalistyczna , PPS) , suffered a fatal split at this time , as the ruling Stalinists applied the salami tactics to dismember the opposition . Communist politicians cooperated with the left @-@ wing PPS faction led by Józef Cyrankiewicz , prime minister under new president Bierut from February 1947 . The socialists ' originally tactical decision to collaborate with the communists resulted in their institutional demise . Cyrankiewicz visited Stalin in Moscow in March 1948 to discuss the idea of a party merger . The Kremlin , increasingly uncomfortable with Gomu?ka 's communist party leadership , concurred , and Cyrankiewicz secured his own political place for the future (until 1972) . In December 1948 , after the removal of Gomu?ka and imposition of Bierut as the communist Polish Workers ' Party chief , the PPR and Cyrankiewicz 's rump PPS joined ranks to form the Polish United Workers ' Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza ; PZPR) , in power for the next four decades . Poland became a de facto one @-@ party state and a satellite state of the Soviet Union . Only two other parties were allowed to exist legally : United People 's Party , a small farmers ' party , and the Democratic Party , a token intelligentsia party (see also : political organization in Poland 1945 ? 1989) .

As the period of Sovietization and Stalinism began , the PZPR was anything but united . The most important split among the communists occurred before the union with PPS , when the Stalinists forced Gomu?ka out of the PPR 's top office and suppressed his native communist faction . The PZPR had become divided into several factions , which espoused different views and methods and sought different degrees of the Polish state 's distinction and independence from the Soviet Union . While the official ideology , the Russian version of Marxism , was new to Poland , the communist regime continued , in many psychologically and practically important ways , the precepts , methods and manners of past Polish ruling circles , including those of the Sanation , the National Democracy , and the 19th century traditions of cooperation with the partitioning powers .

With Poland being a member of the Soviet Bloc , the Party 's pursuits of power and reform were permanently hindered by the restrictions and limits imposed by the rulers of the Soviet Union , by the resentful attitude of Polish society , acutely conscious of its lack of national independence and freedoms , and by the understanding of the Party managers that their positions would terminate once they stop conforming to the requirements of the Soviet alliance (because of both the lack of public support and Soviet reaction) . Poland 's political history was governed by the mutual dependence of the Soviets and the Polish communists .

The nomenklatura political elite developed . It comprised leaders , administrators and managers within the ruling party structure , in all branches of central and local government and in institutions of all kinds . The nomenklatura members were appointed by the Party and exercised political control in all spheres of public life , for example economic development , industry management or education . For the Party , the privileged nomenklatura layer was maintained to assure the proper placement of people who were ideologically reliable and otherwise qualified , but the revisionist dissidents Jacek Kuro? and Karol Modzelewski later described this system as a class dictatorship of central political bureaucracy for its own sake . The Polish public widely approved the many social undertakings of the communist government , including family apartment construction , child care , worker vacation and resorts , health care and full employment policies , but the special privileges granted nomenklatura and the security services were resented .

= = Stalinist era (1948 ? 56) = =

= = = Removal of Gomu?ka , Stalinist repressions = = =

As in other Eastern Bloc countries , there was a Soviet @-@ style political purge of communist officials in Poland after 1948 , accused of " nationalist " or other " deviationist " tendencies . In September , W?adys?aw Gomu?ka who opposed Stalin 's direct control of the Polish PPR party , was charged , together with a group of communist leaders who like Gomu?ka spent the war in Poland , with ideological departure from Leninism , and dismissed from the post of the Party 's first secretary . Gomu?ka , accused of " right @-@ wing nationalist deviations " , had indeed

emphasized the Polish socialist traditions and severely criticized Rosa Luxemburg 's SDKPiL party for belittling Polish national aspirations . More insidiously , the Soviets claimed Gomu?ka 's participation in an anti @-@ Soviet international conspiracy . Following Boles?aw Bierut 's order , he was arrested by the Ministry of Public Security (MBP) in early August 1951 and interrogated by Romkowski and Fejgin , as demanded by the Soviets . Gomu?ka was not subjected to physical torture unlike other communists persecuted under the regime of Bierut , Jakub Berman and other Stalin 's associates . Under interrogation he defiantly conducted his defense , threatened to reveal " the whole truth " if put on a trial , and remained unbroken . Gomu?ka was thus placed in prison without a typical show trial until released in December 1954 . Bierut , heading the victorious PPR faction whose members spent the war in the Soviet Union , replaced Gomu?ka as the PPR (and then the PZPR) leader . Gomu?ka remained protected by his Polish comrades to the best of their ability and the record of his sometime defiance came in handy when in 1956 there was an opportunity for the Polish party to reassert itself .

The Stalinist government was controlled by Polish communists originating from wartime factions and organizations operating in the Soviet Union under Stalin , such as the Union of Polish Patriots . Their leaders at that time included Wanda Wasilewska and Zygmunt Berling . Now in Poland , those who remained politically active and in favor ruled the country , aided by the MBP and Soviet " advisers " , who were placed in every arm of the government and state security as a guarantee of the pro @-@ Soviet policy of the state . The most important of them was Konstantin Rokossovsky (Konstanty Rokossowski in Polish) , defense minister of Poland from 1949 to 1956 , former marshal and war hero in the Soviet Armed Forces . Military conscription was introduced following a postwar hiatus and , under the careful tutelage of the Soviet advisers , the army soon reached its permanent size of 400 @,@ 000 men .

The Soviet @-@ style secret police and the central security office Urz?d Bezpiecze?stwa (UB) grew to around 32 @,@ 000 agents as of 1953 . At its Stalinist peak , there was one UB agent for every 800 Polish citizens . The MBP was also in charge of the Internal Security Corps , the Civil Militia (MO) , border guard , prison staff and paramilitary police ORMO used for special actions (with over 100 @,@ 000 members) . The ORMO originated from popular self @-@ defense efforts , a spontaneous reaction to the explosion of crime in the power vacuum of 1944 ? 45 . In February 1946 the PPR channeled and formalized this citizen militia movement , creating its ostensibly crime control voluntary ORMO structure .

Primarily in Stalin 's lifetime , the public prosecutors and judges as well as functionaries of the MBP , S?u?ba Bezpiecze?stwa and the GZI WP military police engaged in acts recognized by international law as crimes against humanity and crimes against peace . One example was the torture and execution of seven members of the 4th Headquarters of the combatant post @-@ Home Army Freedom and Independence (WiN) organization in the Mokotów Prison in Warsaw , after the official amnesty and their voluntary disclosure . All executed members of the WiN took active part in anti @-@ Nazi resistance during World War II . The postwar Polish Army , intelligence and police were full of Soviet NKVD officers who stationed in Poland with the Northern Group of Forces until 1956 .

Mass arrests continued during the early 1950s . In October 1950 , 5 @,@ 000 people were arrested in one night , in the so @-@ called " Operation K " . It was during these suppressions that the new constitution of July 1952 was promulgated and the state officially became the Polish People 's Republic . In 1952 over 21 @,@ 000 people were arrested , and according to official data , by the second half of 1952 there were 49 @,@ 500 political prisoners being held . In one very shocking case , the former Home Army commander Emil Fieldorf was subjected to several years of brutal persecution in the Soviet Union and Poland before being executed in February 1953 , just before Stalin 's death .

Resistance to the Soviet and native Stalinists was widespread among not only the general population but also the PZPR ranks , which limited the oppressive system 's damage in Poland to well below that of other European communist @-@ ruled countries . Political violence after 1947 was not widespread . The Church , subjected to partial property confiscations , remained largely intact , the marginalized to a considerable degree intelligentsia retained its potential to affect future

reforms , the peasantry avoided wholesale collectivization and remnants of private enterprise survived . Gradual liberalizing changes took place between Stalin 's death in 1953 and the Polish October of 1956 .

= = = Nationalization and centrally planned economy = = =

In February 1948 , Minister of Industry Hilary Minc attacked the Central Planning Office of Poland as a " bourgeois " remnant , the Office was abolished and the Polish Stalinist economy was born . The government , headed by President Bierut , Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz and Marxist economist Minc , embarked on a sweeping program of economic reform and national reconstruction . Poland was brought into line with the Soviet model of a " people 's republic " and centrally planned socialist economy , in place of the façade of democracy and partial market economy which the regime had maintained until 1948 .

The relationships of ownership of the industry , the banking sector and rural property after the nationalization and the land reform were fundamentally altered . The changes , implemented in the name of egalitarianism , enjoyed broad societal approval and support .

The structure of the Polish economy was established in the late 1940s and the early 1950s . Soviet @-@ style planning begun in 1950 with the Six @-@ Year Plan . The plan focused on rapid development of heavy industry (" accelerated industrialization " driven by Soviet military demands) and (eventually futile) collectivization of agriculture . Among the main projects was the Lenin Steelworks and its supporting " socialist city " of Nowa Huta (New Steel Mill) , both built from the scratch in the early 1950s near Kraków , of which Nowa Huta soon became a part . The land seized from prewar large landowners was redistributed to the poorer peasants , but subsequent attempts at taking the land from farmers for collectivization met wide resentment . In what became known as the battle for trade , the private trade and industry were nationalized . Within few years most private shops disappeared from Poland . The regime embarked on the campaign of collectivization (State Agricultural Farms were created) , although the pace of this change was slower than in other Soviet satellites . Poland remained the only Eastern Bloc country where individual peasants would continue to dominate agriculture . A Soviet @-@ Polish trade treaty , initiated in January 1948 , dictated the dominant direction of Poland 's future foreign trade and economic cooperation .

In 1948 the United States announced the Marshall Plan initiative to help rebuild postwar Europe and thus gain more political power there . After initially welcoming the idea of Poland 's participation in the plan , the Polish government declined the American offer under pressure from Moscow . Also , following the Uprising of 1953 in East Germany , Poland was forced by the Soviet Union to give up its claims to compensation from Germany , which as a result paid no significant compensation for war damages , either to the Polish state or to Polish citizens . Poland received compensation in the form of land and property left behind by the German population of the annexed western territories .

Despite the lack of American aid , the East European " command economies " , including Poland , made some progress in bridging the historically existing wealth gap with the market economy driven Western Europe . Because of the capital accumulation the Polish national income grew in real terms by over 76 % and the agricultural and industrial production more than doubled between 1947 and 1950 . The economic transition and industrialization were accompanied and made possible by massive social transformations , as peasants migrated and were converted into city dwelling working class (1 @.@ 8 million between 1946 and 1955) and the country went through a period of rapid urbanization . The influx of cheap labor and the availability of the Soviet market facilitated an accumulation of resources , despite low productivity and insufficient investment in new technologies . The centrally planned socialist economies of Eastern Europe did relatively better than the West in terms of the post @-@ war years growth , only to sustain economic damage later , especially after the 1973 oil crisis . However , the rise in living standards caused by the earlier industrial dynamics was not comparable to that in the West .

= = = Reforms , resistance and beginning of de @-@ Stalinization = = =

The last Polish ? Soviet territorial exchange took place in 1951 . Some 480 km² (185 sq mi) of land along the border were swapped between Poland and the Soviet Union . The adjustment was made to the decisive economic benefit of the Soviet side due to rich deposits of coal given up by Poland . Within eight years following the exchange , the Soviets built four large coal mines there , producing 15 million tons of coal annually . Poland increased its area of scenic wooded ecosystems in the western part of the Eastern Carpathian Mountains and its territory became even more compact .

The constitution of 1952 guaranteed universal free health care . The large state @-@ owned enterprises provided to employees an extensive range of welfare and leisure activities , including housing , sports facilities and hospitals , which started to diminish in the 1970s . In the early 1950s , the Stalinist regime also carried out major changes to the education system . The communist program of free and compulsory school education for all , and the establishment of new free universities , received much support . The communists screened out what facts and interpretations were to be taught ; history and other sciences had to follow Marxist views approved by ideological censorship . During 1951 ? 53 , a large number of prewar professors who were perceived as " reactionary " by the new regime was dismissed from universities . The government control over art and artists deepened . The Soviet @-@ style socialist realism became the only formula accepted by the authorities after 1949 . Most works of art and literature presented to the public had to be in line with the views of the Party and thus present its propaganda (see also : Socialist realism in Poland) .

The reforms often brought relief for a significant part of the population . After the Second World War many people were willing to accept communist rule in exchange for the restoration of relatively normal life ; hundreds of thousands joined the communist party and actively supported the regime . Nonetheless , a latent popular discontent remained present . Many Poles adopted an attitude that might be called " resigned cooperation " . Others , like some of the remnants of the Home Army , the Freedom and Independence organization that originated from it and especially the National Armed Forces , actively opposed the communists , hoping for a World War III that would liberate Poland . Those who took up arms against the communist regime are collectively known as the cursed soldiers . Most had surrendered during the amnesty of 1947 , but brutal repressions by the secret police continued and some fought well into the 1950s .

The communists further alienated many Poles by persecuting the Catholic Church . The PAX Association created in 1947 and led by the former prewar far @-@ right activist Bolesław Piasecki , attempted to divide the Catholic movement and promote a communist rule @-@ friendly , collaborationist church . The PAX did not get very far in molding the Catholic public opinion , but published numerous books and officially approved daily Catholic press . In 1953 the Primate of Poland , Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was placed under house arrest , even though before he had been willing to make compromises with the government . In the early 1950s , the war against religion by the secret police led to the arrest and torture of hundreds of Polish religious personalities , culminating in the Stalinist show trial of the Kraków Curia . The Office of the Council of Ministers (government) produced a list of regime @-@ approved bishops . See also : Polish anti @-@ religious campaign .

The constitution of 1952 on paper guaranteed all sorts of democratic rights and freedoms . In reality , the country was controlled extra @-@ constitutionally by the Polish United Workers ' Party , which used its own rules and practices to supervise all governmental institutions specified in the constitution . The post of President of Poland was replaced with the collective Council of State , but Bierut , the Party 's first secretary , remained the effective leader of Poland . In the future , the existence of a constitution with democratic provisions would give the opposition a legal tool and a way to pressure the regime .

Stalin died in 1953 , which was followed by a partial thaw in Poland . Nikita Khrushchev became first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union . The PZPR 's Second Congress deliberated in March 1954 . Cyrankiewicz , previously replaced by Bierut , was returned to the post of prime minister (to remain in this capacity until December 1970) . The Six @-@ Year Plan was adjusted to increase production of items for popular consumption . Khrushchev , present at the

Congress , asked Bierut for the reasons of the continuing detention of Gomu?ka , " a good communist " ; Bierut denied having specific knowledge of Gomu?ka 's imprisonment .

Following the defection to the West and revelations of its official Józef ?wiat?o , the Ministry of Public Security was abolished in December 1954 . Gomu?ka and his associates were freed from confinement and censorship was slightly relaxed . The two notable periodicals braving the prohibitions were Po prostu [Simply] and Nowa Kultura [The New Culture] (Po prostu was closed down and its defenders brutally pacified in October 1957 , just one year after Gomu?ka 's rise to power) . From early 1955 , the Polish press engaged in criticizing the Stalinist recent past and praising the older Polish socialist traditions (social democratic Marxism and national independence) . Political discussion clubs were on the rise throughout the country . The Party itself appeared to be moving in the social democratic direction . Leftist intellectuals , who had joined the Party because of their commitment to social justice , were heading in that direction more decisively and they soon gave rise to the Polish revisionism movement .

In February 1956 Khrushchev denounced Stalin 's cult of personality at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and embarked on a reform course . The de @-@ Stalinization of official Soviet ideology left Poland 's Stalinist hardliners in a difficult position . While unrest and desire for reform and change among both intellectuals and workers was beginning to surface throughout the Eastern Bloc , the death of Stalin 's ally Bierut in March 1956 in Moscow (the veteran hardliner chief was attending the Soviet party 's congress) exacerbated an existing split in the Polish party . In March Bierut was succeeded by Edward Ochab as first secretary . As the 20th Congress launched also a process of partial democratisation of Polish political and economic life , Ochab engaged in reforms intended to promote industrial decentralization and improve living standards .

The number of security agents was cut by 22 % and , by a widespread amnesty , 35 @,@ 000 detainees across the entire country were released . 9 @,@ 000 imprisoned for political reasons were freed in all . Hardline Stalinists , such as Jakub Berman , Roman Romkowski and Anatol Fejgin , were removed from power , some arrested . Berman , dismissed in May , by Gomu?ka 's decision was never prosecuted . Under Gomu?ka , a few perpetrators of Stalinist crimes were prosecuted and sentenced to prison terms . A much broader plan to charge the responsible and verify all of the security apparatus was formally presented by the prosecutors , but the action was not approved by Gomu?ka , who counted among the Stalinist persecution victims , as did his wife . Gomu?ka conducted some purges and reforms but did not want to destabilize the security system , now under his control , by wide @-@ ranging formal prosecutions .

= = Gomu?ka 's road to socialism (1956 ? 70) = =

= = = Polish October = = =

Beginning on 28 June 1956 , workers in the industrial city of Pozna? , who had repeatedly , but in vain petitioned the authorities to intervene and improve their deteriorating situation , went on strike and rioted in response to a cut in wages and changed working conditions . Demonstrations by factory workers turned into a huge city @-@ wide protest . 16 tanks , 2 armoured personnel carriers and 30 vehicles were brought to bear by a local military commander . Some of them were seized by the protesters , who also broke into the local government buildings . 57 people were killed and several hundred injured in two days of fighting . Several major military formations entered the scene , but the army 's role was mainly that of support of the police and the security forces action . At the Pozna? radio station , Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz in his widely publicized speech warned and threatened the rioters : he " ? who will dare raise his hand against the people 's rule may be sure that ? the authorities will chop off his hand " . Of the 746 people officially detained during and in the aftermath of the disturbances , almost 80 % were workers . The authorities launched an investigation , attempting to uncover a claimed premeditated instigation and involvement by Western or anticommunist underground centers . Such efforts were unsuccessful and the events were found to have been spontaneous and locally supported . The Pozna? revolt 's lasting impact was that it

caused a deeper and more liberal realignment within the Polish communist party and its relationship to Moscow .

Deeply shaken by the protests and violence , the 7th Plenum of the Central Committee , held in July 1956 , split into two groups , the " ethno @-@ nationalist " Natolin and the " reformist " Pu?awy factions , named after the locations where they held their meetings . Natolin consisted largely of communist officials from the army and state security , including Mieczys?aw Moczar , Zenon Kliszko and Zenon Nowak , who advocated the removal of " Stalin 's Jewish protégés " , but were themselves of Stalinist sympathies . Pu?awy faction included communists of Jewish origin from the security apparatus , many of whom spent the war in the Soviet Union , disillusioned opportunists , and members of the old communist intelligentsia . Many were former Stalinist fanatics , past Gomu?ka 's enemies , now turned liberal reformers , supporters of Gomu?ka 's return to power . Both factions supported the Sovietization of Poland with somewhat different aims , but the staunch Stalinists lacked the support of Khrushchev . The regime turned to conciliation : wage rises and other reforms for the Pozna? workers were announced . In the Party and among the intellectuals demands calling for wider reforms of the Stalinist system were becoming more widespread and intense .

Realizing the need for new leadership , in what became known as the Polish October , the Politburo chose Gomu?ka , who had been released from prison and reinstated in the Party , and the Central Committee 's 8th Plenum elected him without a Soviet approval the new first secretary of the PZPR . Subsequently Gomu?ka convinced the Soviet leaders that he would preserve the Soviet influence in Poland . Gomu?ka 's elevation was preceded by ominous Soviet military moves and an arrival of Soviet high @-@ level delegation led by Khrushchev , which flew into Warsaw to witness and influence the upheaval in the Polish party . After the sometimes confrontational encounters and negotiations , they soon returned to Moscow , where the Soviet leader announced on 21 October that the idea of an armed intervention in Poland should be abandoned . This position was soon reinforced by the pressure from communist China , which expressed its great power aspirations and demanded that the Soviets leave the new Polish leadership alone . On 21 October in Warsaw Gomu?ka 's return to power was accomplished , giving rise to the era of national communism in Poland . Gomu?ka pledged to dismantle Stalinism and in his acceptance speech raised numerous social democratic @-@ sounding reformist ideas , giving hope to the left @-@ wing revisionists and others in Polish society that the communist state was , after all , reformable . The revisionists replaced and claimed to represent the worker movement , recently defeated in Pozna? . The main goals in pursuit of which they engaged were political freedom and self @-@ management in state enterprises . However , the end of Soviet influence in Eastern Europe was nowhere in sight . On 14 May 1955 , the Warsaw Pact was signed in the Polish capital , to counteract the earlier establishment of NATO .

Many Soviet officers serving in the Polish Armed Forces were dismissed , but very few Stalinist officials were put on trial for the repressions of the Bierut period . The Pu?awy faction argued that mass trials of Stalinist officials , many of them Jewish , would incite animosity toward the Jews . Konstantin Rokossovsky and other Soviet advisers were sent home , and the Polish communist establishment and system took on a more independent orientation . Gomu?ka realized that the Soviets would never allow Poland to leave the Warsaw Pact because of Poland 's strategic position between the Soviet Union and Germany . He agreed that Soviet troops could remain in Poland and that no overt anti @-@ Soviet outbursts would be allowed . However , Gomu?ka formalized the Polish @-@ Soviet relations and the unprecedented , in the Soviet @-@ allied state relations , military cooperation treaty signed in December 1956 stated that the stationing of the Soviet forces in Poland " can in no way violate the sovereignty of the Polish state and cannot lead to their interference in internal matters of the Polish People 's Republic " . Poland avoided the risk of a Soviet armed intervention of the kind that crushed the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in October . Gomu?ka had a pragmatic awareness of political realities and for the duration of his career he rewarded the Soviets for his internal leeway with loyal support . In one act of defiance , the Polish delegation at the United Nations abstained in November 1956 from the vote condemning the Soviet intervention in Hungary .

There were repeated attempts by some Polish academics and philosophers , many related to the prewar Lwów ? Warsaw school ? such as Leszek Ko?akowski , Stanis?aw Ossowski and Adam Schaff ? to develop a specific form of Polish Marxism . Their attempts to create a bridge between Poland 's history and Marxist ideology were mildly successful , although stifled due to the regime 's unwillingness to risk the wrath of the Soviet Union for deviating too far from the Soviet party line . Ko?akowski , a leading revisionist , was verbally attacked by Gomu?ka in 1957 , expelled from the Party in 1966 and in 1968 had to emigrate .

= = = Scaling back of campaign promises = = =

Poland welcomed Gomu?ka 's rise to power with relief . Many Poles still rejected communism , but the realities of Soviet dominance dictated that Poland could not shake @-@ off communist rule . Gomu?ka promised an end to police terror , greater intellectual and religious freedom , higher wages , and the reversal of collectivization ; and to some degree he fulfilled these promises . Although little changed socioeconomically , the intelligentsia experienced significant gains felt as " a certain diversity and revitalization of elite public life " . The dissident Club of the Crooked Circle , a discussion group considered a precursor of the KOR , survived until 1962 . Other forms of collective community expression and a legally guaranteed academic autonomy lasted until the 1968 Polish political crisis . The academic discourse was in marked contrast to the treatment afforded to workers , whose self @-@ management councils that had spontaneously formed in 1956 were neutralized and brought under control of the Party by 1958 . In the communist era , because of their class role in the official ideology and leadership 's sensibilities , workers enjoyed some clout and a degree of protection of their economic interests , on the condition that they refrained from engaging in independent politics or publicly exerting pressure .

In October 1957 , Poland 's foreign minister Adam Rapacki proposed a European nuclear @-@ free zone that would include the territories of Poland , West Germany , East Germany and Czechoslovakia . In August 1961 the new Berlin Wall cemented the division of Europe .

After the first wave of reform , Gomu?ka 's regime started to move back on their promises . The communist control over the mass media and universities was gradually tightened , and many of the younger and more reformist members of the Party were forced out . The reform @-@ promising Gomu?ka of 1956 turned into the authoritarian Gomu?ka of the 1960s . Although Poland enjoyed a period of relative stability in that decade , the idealism of the " Polish October " faded away . The decisions made at the XIII Plenum of the Central Committee (1963) meant a definite end of the post @-@ October liberalization period . The demise of Gomu?ka 's tactical allies , the Pu?awy faction , gradually replaced by Gomu?ka 's own people , was marked by the removal from the Politburo of Roman Zambrowski , the leading Jewish politician .

Poland under Gomu?ka 's rule was generally described as one of the more " liberal " communist regimes . However , Poles could still go to prison for writing political satire about the Party leader , as Janusz Szpota?ski did , or for publishing a book abroad . A March 1964 " Letter of the 34 " , signed by leading intellectuals and delivered to the office of Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz , criticized the worsening censorship and demanded a more open cultural policy , as guaranteed by the Constitution . Jacek Kuro? and Karol Modzelewski were expelled from the Party and from 1965 imprisoned for written criticism (the Open Letter to the Party) of the Party rule and pointing out the contradictory nature of the supposedly workers ' state . Kuro? and Modzelewski accused the regime of betraying the revolutionary cause ; like many younger Polish reformers , they spoke from leftist positions and were ideologically closely aligned with Western radicals of the 1960s .

In the following years , the regime became steadily less liberal and more repressive . Gomu?ka 's popularity declined as his initial vision lost its impetus . He reacted to increasing criticism by refusing to budge and insulating himself with the help of cronies , of whom Zenon Kliszko was the most influential . Kliszko 's advice in the long run turned out not to be constructive . Intellectuals , students and other Poles became disillusioned and frustrated with Gomu?ka regime 's record and his own self @-@ righteous style . Within the Party , the Minister of the Interior Mieczys?aw Moczar and his nationalist @-@ communist faction , " the Partisans " (and the much broader system of political

clientele known as Moczarowcy), were looking for an opportunity to assert their dominance .

By the mid 1960s , Poland was starting to experience also economic difficulties and the appreciable thus far standard of living improvements were showing signs of stagnation (during 1960 ? 70 real wages for workers grew only by an average of 1 . 8 % per year) . The postwar economic boom was ending and the increasingly globalized and integrated world economy was becoming inhospitable to national development operating behind trade barriers . Similar to other communist regimes , Poland was spending too much on heavy industry , armaments and prestige projects , and too little on consumer production . The failure of Soviet style collectivization returned the collectivized land to the peasants , but most of their farms were too small to be prosperous and productivity in agriculture remained low . Economic relations with West Germany were frozen due to East German interference and resistance to economic integration . Gomułka attributed the signs of economic decline to the faulty implementation of the fundamentally correct directions issued by the central organs of the Party . He failed to appreciate the corrective role of the market , whose feedback could not be replaced by theoretical computations , planning and administrative decisions . On the other hand , pursuing conservative investment rather than consumption oriented economic policies , his regime generated no foreign debt .

From 1960 , the regime increasingly implemented anti Catholic policies , including harassment , atheistic propaganda , and measures that made carrying out religious practices more difficult . In 1965 , the Conference of Polish Bishops issued the Letter of Reconciliation of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops . In 1966 , the celebrations of the 1,000th anniversary of the Baptism of Poland led by the Primate , Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and other bishops , who toured the country , turned into a huge demonstration of the power and popularity of the Catholic Church in Poland . In fierce competition , the state authorities conducted their own national celebrations , stressing the origin of the Polish statehood , but the display of the Polish Church hierarchy 's command of enormous crowds in a land ruled by the communists must have impressed the Catholic prelates in the Vatican and elsewhere . The state church dialogue , symbolized by the presence of the few Znak independent Catholic deputies in parliament , was rapidly deteriorating .

== 1968 events ==

By the 1960s , rival regime officials and their followers , generally people of a younger generation , had begun to plot against the rule of Gomułka and his associates . Poland 's security chief Mieczysław Moczar , a wartime communist partisan commander , based his appeal on nationalistic rhetoric combined with anti intelligentsia and anti Jewish sentiments and became the chief challenger . The party leader in Upper Silesia , Edward Gierek , who had become involved with the communist movement as a teenage mining industry laborer in France , also emerged as a possible alternative leader . Gierek was favored by the more pragmatic and technocratic members of the nomenklatura . From January 1968 , Polish revisionist opposition and other circles were strongly influenced by the developing movement of the Prague Spring .

In March 1968 , student demonstrations at Warsaw University broke out in the wake of the government 's banning of the performance of a play by Adam Mickiewicz (*Dziady* , written in 1824) at the National Theatre in Warsaw earlier that year , because of its alleged " anti Soviet references " . Subsequently state security and ORMO units attacked protesting university students in several major cities .

In what became known as the March 1968 events , Moczar used the spontaneous and informal celebrations of the outcome of the 1967 Arab ? Israeli war and the Warsaw theatre affair as pretexts to launch an anti intellectual and anti Semitic (officially designated as " anti Zionist ") press campaign , whose real goal was to weaken the pro reform liberal party faction and attack other circles . Thousands of generally secular and integrated people of Jewish origin lost their employment and some 15 , 000 Jews emigrated between 1967 and 1971 . Of prewar Europe 's largest Jewish community , only several thousand people remained in Poland .

Other victims were college students , many of whom were expelled from their institutions and had their careers destroyed , academic teachers who tried to defend the students and the academic

institutions themselves : Warsaw University had several departments administratively dissolved . Liberal intelligentsia members , Jewish or not , were removed from the government and other places of employment . Leftist intellectuals and student leaders lost what was left of their faith in the ostensibly socialist government . Finally the Party itself was purged of many thousand suspect members , people who somehow did not fit the new environment of intolerance and hatred . The 1968 purges meant also the beginning of a large scale generational replacement of the Party executive membership , a process that continued into the early 1970s , after Gomułka 's departure . The prewar communist cadres were removed and people whose careers were formed in People 's Poland took their place , which , early in his term , gave Gomułka 's successor Edward Gierek one of the youngest in Europe elites of power .

The revisionist dissident prominence in the 1968 events overshadowed the equally significant awakening taking place among the working class of Poland . Gdańsk , where thousands of students and workers fought the police on March 15 , had the highest in the country rate of administrative detentions and court cases . The greatest proportion of people arrested and imprisoned in March and April 1968 in Poland were classified by the authorities as " workers " .

An internal attempt was made to discredit Gomułka 's leadership , but there were aspects of the ongoing witch hunt which he found to be to his advantage and he tolerated it until the societal damage wrecked by the Moczar movement had become irreversible . Gomułka 's regime reasserted itself and was saved by a combination of international and domestic factors , including the Moczar faction 's inability to take over the party and state apparatus . The Soviet Union , now led by Leonid Brezhnev , was preoccupied with the crisis in Czechoslovakia and not inclined to support personal changes in the Polish leadership .

In August 1968 , the Polish People 's Army took part in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia . Some Polish intellectuals protested , and Ryszard Siwiec burned himself alive during the official national holiday celebrations . The Polish participation in the crushing of the Czech liberal communism (called socialism with a human face , and , according to David Ost , constituting the crowning achievement of Marxist revisionism) further alienated Gomułka from his former liberal supporters . But within the Party , the opposition to Gomułka faded and the 5th Congress of the PZPR in November reconfirmed his rule . Brezhnev , who attended the gathering , used the occasion to expound his Brezhnev Doctrine , a self @-@ granted Soviet right to forcefully intervene if an allied state strays too far from the fraternal course .

= = = Treaty with West Germany , food riots and the ousting of Gomułka = = =

In December 1970 Gomułka scored a major political victory when Poland obtained a West German recognition of the post @-@ World War II borders . The German side secured the right to emigrate to West Germany for the residents of Poland of German identity and to help financially those who stayed by granting pensions : hundreds of thousands eventually became affected . German Chancellor Willy Brandt , who signed the agreement , also asked on his knees for forgiveness for the crimes of the Nazis (Warschauer Kniefall) . His gesture was understood in Poland as being addressed to all Poles , although it was actually made at the site of the Warsaw Ghetto and was thus directed primarily toward the Jews . The notable reconciliation process between the Polish and German nations was initiated five years earlier , when the Polish Church issued its famous Letter of Reconciliation of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops , criticized then by the Polish government .

Gomułka felt proud and secure after the new treaty with West Germany , his milestone political achievement . It signified a lasting trend in Poland 's international policy : extricating the country from the disproportional dependence on Russia , and compensating the security vulnerability by building good relations with Germany .

But the event could not mask the economic crisis into which Poland was drifting , exacerbated by Soviet demands for more military spending . Although the system of fixed , artificially low food prices kept urban discontent under control , it caused further economic strain . In the long run the situation was unsustainable , and on 12 December 1970 (just before Christmas) , the regime suddenly

announced massive increases in the prices of basic foodstuffs , the government 's main source of hard currency when exported . The new measures were incomprehensible to many urban workers , and their provocative timing (the most intense food purchase period for most Polish families) led to strong social reaction and ultimately Gomu?ka 's fall from power .

On 14 - 19 December 1970 mass demonstrations against the price rises broke out in the northern coastal cities of Gda?sk , Gdynia , Elbl?g and Szczecin . In violent confrontations at those and other locations 19 public buildings were destroyed or damaged , including the Party headquarters in Gda?sk and Szczecin . The PZPR Central Committee was deliberating in Warsaw , but a smaller conference , led by Gomu?ka , issued an authorization for a limited use of lethal force to defend lives and property . Nevertheless , Gomu?ka remained determined to impose a forceful resolution of the conflict . Among the leaders of the Party who arrived on the coast and directed the local enforcement actions , initially in Gda?sk , were Zenon Kliszko and Stanis?aw Kocio?ek . In Gdynia , the soldiers were instructed to prevent protesters from returning to factory buildings ; they fired into a crowd of workers emerging from commuter trains . Fatal confrontations took place also in Szczecin . The exact number of people killed in the region in December is not known , but is believed to be higher than the officially given figure of 44 .

The protest movement spread to other cities , leading to more strikes and causing angry workers to occupy many factories . The general strike across Poland was scheduled for December 21 , 1970 .

The Party leadership meeting in Warsaw on 20 December recognized the danger that the working class revolt presented to their system , and , in consultations with the disturbed Soviet leaders , proceeded with arranging the resignation of Gomu?ka , who was by then stressed out and ill . Several of his collaborators were also removed . Edward Gierek was drafted as the new first secretary . Mieczys?aw Moczar , another strong contender , was not trusted (or was even blamed for the current debacle) by the Soviets .

Another strike in Szczecin broke out on 22 January 1971 . In a risky move , Gierek went to Szczecin on 24 January and to Gda?sk the next day . He met the workers personally , apologizing for the mistakes of the past and saying that as a former worker himself he understood their plight and would now govern Poland for the people . Workers striking in Szczecin formulated demands in the area of freely elected worker councils and union representatives . Gierek agreed , but the authorities soon marginalized and eliminated the worker leaders from the legally existing structures and their places of employment . The February 1971 ?ód? strikes followed and concentrated on economic demands . Afterwards prices were lowered , wage increases were announced , and sweeping economic and political changes were promised .

The Polish opposition movement , traditionally led by the intelligentsia , after the two heavy blows of 1968 and 1970 was in disarray and silent . Its tenuous connection with the " communist " party was permanently broken , but a new strategy had yet to emerge . However , already in 1971 Leszek Ko?akowski published in the émigré Kultura journal a seminal article entitled Theses on Hope and Hopelessness . It attempted to theoretically necessitate and practically justify a civil democratizing resistance movement , valid even in the repressed and seemingly deadlocked society of state socialism .

= = Gierek decade (1970 - 80) = =

= = = Catching up with the West = = =

Gierek , like Gomu?ka in 1956 , came to power on a raft of promises that everything would be different from now on : wages would rise , prices would remain stable , there would be freedom of speech , and those responsible for the violence at Gdynia and elsewhere would be punished . Although Poles were much more skeptical than they had been in 1956 , Gierek was believed to be an honest and well @-@ intentioned man , and his promises bought him some time . He used this time to create a new economic program , one based on large @-@ scale borrowing from banks in the West - mainly from the United States and West Germany - to buy technology that would

upgrade Poland's production of export goods. This massive borrowing, estimated to have totaled over 24 billion US (1970s) dollars during Gierek's years, was used to re-equip and modernize Polish industry, and to import consumer goods to give the workers more incentive to work.

For the next few years, the new regime optimistically engaged in reform and experimentation and for the first time many Poles could afford to buy cars, televisions and other consumer goods. The authorities made sure that the workers received proper wages. The peasants had their compulsory deliveries abolished, were paid higher prices for their products and free health service was finally extended to rural, self-employed Poland. The intellectuals had censorship eased and Poles were able to travel to the West and maintain foreign contacts with little difficulty. Relations with the Polish emigrant communities were strengthened. There was some cultural and political relaxation and an improved freedom of speech environment, exercised for example by the respected weekly *Polityka* of the Polish Party. Massive investments were made, expected to both improve the standard of living of the various segments of society and establish an internationally competitive Polish industry and agriculture, based on purchases of Western technology. The modernized manufacturing would result in a vastly expanded export of Polish-made products to the West, which in turn would generate hard currency to pay off the debts.

This "New Development Strategy", based on import-led growth, depended on the present global economic conditions and the program faltered suddenly because of worldwide recession and increased oil prices. The effects of the 1973-74 oil crisis produced an inflationary surge followed by a recession in the West, which resulted in a sharp increase in the price of imported consumer goods in Poland, coupled with a decline in demand for Polish exports, particularly coal. Poland's foreign debt, absent at the time of Gomułka's departure, rose rapidly under Gierek to reach a multibillion-dollar figure. Continuing borrowing from the West had become increasingly difficult. Consumer goods began to disappear from Polish shops. The new factories built by Gierek's regime also proved to be largely ineffective and mismanaged, as the basics of market demand and cost effectiveness were often ignored. The significant internal economic reform, promised by the Gierek team, had not materialized.

The Western credits thus helped spur industrial growth and helped Gierek's policy of consumerism, but just for a few years. The industrial production grew by an average of 10% per year between 1971 and 1975 (the years remembered later by many older Poles as most prosperous, considering not only the communist period in Poland), only to dwindle to less than 2% in 1979. Debt servicing that took 12% of export earnings in 1971, rose to 75% in 1979.

In 1975, Poland and almost all other European countries became signatories of the Helsinki Accords and a member of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the creation of which marked the high point of the period of "détente" between the Soviet Union and the United States. Despite the regime's promises that the freedoms listed in the agreement would be implemented in Poland, there was little change. However, the Poles were gradually becoming more aware of the rights they were being denied and emboldened by the knowledge of their government's treaty obligations.

Gierek government's growing difficulties led also to increased dependence on the Soviet Union, including tight economic cooperation and displays of submissiveness not seen under Gomułka's rule. The constitution, amended in February 1976, formalized the alliance with the Soviet Union and the leading role of the communist party. The language of the proposed changes was softened after protests by intellectuals and the Church, but the regime felt it needed additional authority given the indebtedness to the West and the deepening economic crisis. The divisive issues raised helped to coalesce the emerging circles of active political opposition.

Nevertheless, the regime of Gierek deemphasized the Marxist ideology and from his time the "communist" governments of Poland concentrated on pragmatic issues and current concerns. In Polish economic politics new lasting trends were initiated, such as the emphasis on individual initiative, personal aspirations and competition, which some interpreted as an attack on egalitarianism (social inequalities were indeed increasing). Sections of the intelligentsia, nomenklatura and small business gave rise to the emerging middle class. The new "socialist"

ways were less totalitarian , stressed innovation , modern management methods and engaged workers , all seen as necessary to push the outdated economy past the constant crisis stage . Poland of the 1970s became more open to the world and entered the global economy , which permanently changed society , creating at the same time a new type of crisis vulnerability . The opposition thinking , its promotion of society formed by active individuals , developed along complementary concepts .

= = = Renewal of social unrest and the rise of organized opposition = = =

As a result of the 1970 worker rebellion food prices remained frozen and were artificially low . The demand for food products exceeded the supply also because of the higher real wages , which already in the first two years of Gierek 's government increased more than during the entire decade of the 1960s . In June 1976 , in an attempt to reduce consumption , the government introduced a long @-@ announced and several times delayed , but radical price increase : basic foodstuffs had their prices raised by an average of 60 % , three times the rate of Gomu?ka 'a increases from six years before . The associated wage rises were skewed toward the better @-@ off part of the population . The result was an immediate nationwide wave of strikes , with violent demonstrations , looting and labor unrest at the Ursus Factory near Warsaw , in Radom , P?ock and other places . The government quickly backed down and repealed the price rises , but the strike leaders were arrested and put on trial . A series of " spontaneous " large scale public gatherings , intended to convey the " anger of the people " at the " trouble @-@ makers " was staged by the Party leadership in a number of cities , but the Soviet pressure prevented further attempts at raising prices . Gierek 's cordial in the past relations with Leonid Brezhnev were now seriously damaged . Food ration cards , introduced because of the destabilized market in August 1976 , were to remain a feature of life in Poland for the duration of the People 's Republic . The regime 's retreat , having occurred for the second time in several years , amounted to an unprecedented defeat . Within the rigid political system , the government was neither able to reform (it would lose control and power) , nor to satisfy society 's staple needs , because it had to sell abroad all it could to make foreign debt and interests payments . This quandary , combined with the daily reality of the lack of necessities , facilitated the consolidation of organized opposition .

Because of the 1976 disturbances and the subsequent arrests , mistreatment and dismissals of worker militants , a group of intellectuals led by Jacek Kuro? , Antoni Macierewicz , Jan Józef Lipski and Adam Michnik founded and operated the Workers ' Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników ; KOR) . The aim of the KOR was to assist the worker victims of the 1976 repression . Working to support the spontaneous workers ' movements , the dissidents recognized the necessarily predominant role of the working class in resisting the abuses of the regime and the newly formed opposition increasingly became characterized by an alliance of intelligentsia with workers . The KOR , according to Modzelewski , constituted the core of organized opposition and a seed of political alternative ; clearing the way for other opposition formations , it engendered political pluralism . More opposition groups indeed soon followed , including the Movement for Defense of Human and Civic Rights (ROPCiO) , Free Trade Unions of the Coast (WZW) and the Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN) . The periodical Robotnik (" The Worker ") was distributed in factories from September 1977 . The idea of independent trade unions was first raised by the Gda?sk and Szczecin workers striking in 1970 ? 71 , but was later developed and promoted by the KOR and its leftist collaborators , which led to the establishment in 1978 of Free Trade Unions , the precursor of Solidarity . The KPN represented the minority at that time right @-@ wing of the Polish opposition scene . The opposition members tried to resist the regime by denouncing it for violating the Polish constitution , Polish laws and Poland 's international obligations . They fit within the post @-@ Helsinki Soviet Bloc human rights movements and for the most part had not yet developed more radical , anti @-@ system orientations .

For the rest of the 1970s , resistance to the regime grew , assuming also the forms of student groups , clandestine newspapers and publishers , importing books and newspapers , and even a " Flying University " . The regime practiced various forms of repression against the budding reform

movements .

= = = Polish Pope John Paul II = = =

On 16 October 1978 , Poland experienced what many Poles literally believed to be a miracle . Cardinal Karol Wojtyła , the archbishop of Kraków , was elected pope at the Vatican , taking the name John Paul II . The election of a Polish pope had an electrifying effect on what was at that time one of the last idiosyncratically Catholic countries in Europe . When John Paul toured Poland in June 1979 , half a million people came to welcome him in Warsaw , and in the next eight days , about ten million Poles attended at least one of his numerous outdoor masses . Overnight , John Paul became the most important person in Poland , leaving the regime not so much opposed as ignored . However , John Paul did not call for rebellion ; instead , he encouraged the creation of an " alternative Poland " of social institutions independent of the government , so that when the next crisis came , the nation would present a united front .

= = = Polish emigration = = =

The government in exile in London , unrecognized since the end of World War II , ridiculed by the communists , to many Poles was of great symbolic importance . Under President Edward Raczynski it overcame years of internal squabbles , and , after the election of the Polish pope and at the time of the increasingly assertive Polish opposition , improved its image and standing .

The large Polish emigrant communities in North America , Western Europe , and elsewhere , were politically active and lent significant support to those struggling in the country . The staunchly anti-communist American Polonia and other Poles felt grateful for the leadership of President Ronald Reagan . Of the Polish institutions in the West the most important were the Radio Free Europe , whose Polish section was run by Jan Nowak-Jeziorański , and the monthly literary Kultura magazine in Paris , led by Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski .

= = Final decade of the Polish People 's Republic (1980 ? 90) = =

= = = Failing economy and labor unrest of 1980 = = =

By 1980 , the authorities had no choice but to make another attempt to raise consumer prices to realistic levels , but they knew that doing so would likely spark another worker rebellion . Western bankers providing loans to the Polish government at a meeting at the Bank Handlowy in Warsaw on 1 July 1980 made it clear that low prices of consumer goods could no longer be subsidized by the state . The government gave in and on 1 July announced a system of gradual but continuous price rises , particularly for meat . A wave of strikes and factory occupations began at once , with the biggest ones taking place in Lublin in July 1980 .

The strikes reached the politically sensitive Baltic Sea coast , with a sit-down strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk beginning on 14 August . Among the leaders of this strike were Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Wałęsa , a long-fired shipyard electrician who headed the strike committee . A list of 21 demands was formulated by the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee on 17 August . The strike wave spread along the coast , closing the ports and bringing the economy to a halt . With the assistance of the activists from the KOR , and the support of many intellectuals (an Expert Commission was established to aid with the negotiations) , the workers occupying the various factories , mines and shipyards across Poland organized as a united front . They were not limiting their efforts to seeking economic improvements , but made and stuck to the crucial demand , an establishment of trade unions independent of government control . Among other issues raised were rights for the Church , the freeing of political prisoners and an improved health service .

The Party leadership was faced with a choice between repressions on a massive scale and an amicable agreement that would give the workers what they wanted , and thus quieten the aroused

population . They chose the latter . On 31 August Wałęsa signed the Gdańsk Agreement with Mieczysław Jagielski , a member of the Party Politburo . The Agreement acknowledged the right of employees to associate in free trade unions , obliged the government to take steps to eliminate censorship , abolished weekend work , increased the minimum wage , improved and extended welfare and pensions , and increased autonomy of industrial enterprises , where a meaningful role was to be played by workers ' self-management councils . The rule of the Party was significantly weakened (to a " leading role in the state " , not society) but nonetheless explicitly recognized , together with Poland 's international alliances . It was seen as necessary to prevent Soviet intervention by more moderate forces , including leading intelligentsia advisers and the Catholic hierarchy . The fact that all these economic concessions were completely unaffordable escaped attention in the wave of national euphoria that swept the country . In addition to the Gdańsk Agreement , similar documents were signed at other centers of strike activity , in Szczecin (Szczecin Agreement) , Jastrzębie-Zdrój , and at Katowice Steelworks . The period that started afterwards is often called the first part of the " Polish carnival " ? with the second one taking place in the late 1980s .

= = = Solidarity = = =

The Gdańsk Agreement , an aftermath of the August 1980 labor strike , was an important milestone . It led to a national gathering of independent union representatives (Interfactory Organizing Committees , MKZ) on 17 September 1980 in Gdańsk and the formation of the trade union " Solidarity " (Polish Solidarność) , founded on that day and led by Lech Wałęsa . The ideas of the independent union movement spread rapidly throughout Poland ; Solidarity structures were formed in most places of employment and in all regions . Having been able to overcome the regime 's efforts to thwart or derail its activities and status , Solidarity was finally registered in court as a national labor union in November 1980 . Early in 1981 , a network of union organizations at the enterprise level was established ; it included the country 's main industrial complexes such as the Lenin Steelworks in Kraków and the Silesian mines .

Initially , in the KOR 's tradition , Solidarity was an ostensibly non-political movement aiming at reconstruction of civil society . Suddenly thrust into legal existence and prominence in 1980 , Solidarity and the Polish opposition in general lacked a constructive program or consensus regarding further developments . In 1981 , Solidarity accepted the necessity of a political role and helped form a broad anti-ruling system social movement , dominated by the working class and with members ranging from people associated with the Catholic Church to non-communist leftists . The union was backed by intellectual dissidents , including the KOR , and adhered to a policy of nonviolent resistance . According to Karol Modzelewski , the Solidarity of 1980-81 was permeated by the idea of brotherhood between intelligentsia and workers . In the areas of ideology and politics , Solidarity followed the lead of its associated opposition intellectuals .

The activity of Solidarity , although concerned with trade union matters (such as replacing the nomenklatura-run system with worker self-management in enterprise level decision making) , was widely regarded as the first step towards dismantling the regime 's dominance over social institutions , professional organizations and community associations . Because of conditions specific to state socialist society , Solidarity soon lost its labor focus and became a universalist movement that emphasized civic rights and open society . Removing the ruling formation or breaking the dependence on the Soviet Union was not on the agenda . Using strikes and other tactics , the union sought to block government policies . The aims of the original , so-called First Solidarity (1980-81) , were to reform socialism , not to introduce industrial private ownership or promote capitalism in general . Solidarity was an egalitarian and collectivist movement . It did not postulate any re-privatization of state-owned or small rural property , as such concepts were beyond the axiological horizon of Polish society . Solidarity was socialist and social justice was its goal . The First Solidarity upheaval could be viewed also as working people revolting against the emerging capitalist features of the economic order that diminished their role in Gierek-led society , combined with the " anti-politics " approach (

building civil society " without reference to both state and market ") embraced at that time by their allied intellectual leaders . People of decidedly anticommunist or anti @-@ PZPR orientations constituted a relatively small minority within the First Solidarity organization , which accommodated one million communist party members among its ranks . Apart from workers , both individual farmers and students created their own independent organizations : Rural Solidarity and Independent Students ' Union . They were formally recognized by the authorities only after strike actions conducted by activists of both movements in January 1981 .

In September 1980 , in the aftermath of the labor agreements , First Secretary Gierek was removed from office and replaced as Party leader by Stanisław Kania . Kania made promises of the sort that Gomułka and Gierek had made when each came power . But whatever goodwill the new leader gained , it lasted for an even shorter period than it had been the case in 1956 and 1971 , because there was no way that the regime could have kept the promises it had made at Gdańsk , even if it wanted to . The authorities were still trapped by the contradiction : if they followed economic necessity , they would generate political instability . GNP fell in 1979 by 2 % , in 1980 by 8 % and in 1981 by 15 ? 20 % .

At the communist summit in December 1980 in Moscow Kania argued with Leonid Brezhnev and other Warsaw Pact leaders , who pressed for an immediate military intervention in Poland . Kania and Minister of Defense Wojciech Jaruzelski declared their determination to fight the " counterrevolution " in Poland on their own . In regard to Solidarity , they felt , there was still a chance for its healthy , working class current to prevail , not the KOR @-@ instigated anti @-@ socialist , troublemaking elements . President Jimmy Carter and President @-@ elect Ronald Reagan made urgent phone calls to Brezhnev and the intervention was postponed . In the meantime Solidarity , not quite aware of the looming danger , did its revolutionary work , practicing democracy in the union movement and pushing for sovereign society in a number of ways . The autonomous labor unions , united under the Solidarity banner , strove to " recapture public life from the monopoly control of the Party " . On 16 December 1980 , a monument dedicated to the memory of the victims of the 1970 protests on the coast was officially unveiled in Gdańsk in a ceremony that marked the high point in the ascent of Solidarity .

Among the mass protests that occurred at that time were the winter 1981 general strike in Bielsko @-@ Biały , the nationwide warning strike in the spring of that year and hunger demonstrations in summer . The warning strike took place in the aftermath of the Bydgoszcz events (March 1981) , during which the authorities resorted to violence to suppress Solidarity activists . The planned general strike was called off after Solidarity 's questionable deal with the government , but the negotiators worked under a threat of Soviet intervention . Wałęsa 's compromise prevented a confrontation with the regime or its foreign allies , at the price of the protest movement 's loss of some of its dynamics . During the months that followed Solidarity kept getting weaker and its popular support was no longer capable of mass determined action .

Minister Jaruzelski became also prime minister in February 1981 . In June , the Soviet Central Committee pressured the Polish Party for a leadership change , but Jaruzelski received strong support from the military members of the Polish Central Committee . The extraordinary IX Congress of the PZPR took place in July . Kania was reelected the Party 's first secretary , while the organization 's internal reformers suffered a defeat .

As the economic situation kept deteriorating and the regime avoided implementation of the agreed reforms , the government and Solidarity representatives met in early August to discuss the outstanding issues . The talks ended in disagreement . During a conference of Solidarity 's National Commission (a central representative policy making body) that followed , Modzelewski , Kuroń and others proposed a democratic transformation and practical arrangements by which the Union would take upon itself a major political role , participating in governing the country , accepting responsibility for the outcome and keeping social peace , thus relieving the (still) ruling Party of some of its burdens . Such a deal was seen as the only constructive way forward , but it would require government partners interested in a negotiated solution .

The existence of Solidarity and the political liberties that the movement brought paralyzed the authoritarian state and the state @-@ controlled economy . Everyday life was becoming

increasingly unbearable and the public displayed sentiments of extreme volatility . The hostility of the nomenklatura toward Solidarity was rapidly increasing .

At the State Defense Committee meeting on September 13 (the time of the Soviet Exercise Zapad @-@ 81 maneuvers and of renewed pressure on the Polish leadership) , Kania was warned by the uniformed cadres that the progressing counterrevolution must be terminated by an imposition of martial law . The PZPR regional secretaries soon issued the same demands . Under the circumstances , in October First Secretary Kania stepped down and Prime Minister Jaruzelski became also the Party chief .

In September and October , the First Congress of Solidarity deliberated in Gdańsk . Wałęsa faced activist opposition and was barely elected chairman of the organization . The delegates passed a radical reform program in which the word " social " or " socialized " was repeated 150 times . The Congress issued a provocative call for workers in other East European countries to follow in Solidarity 's footsteps . Locally authorized , increasingly " political " strikes continued . They were characterized as " wildcats " by Wałęsa , who desperately tried to impose discipline from the center and reach an accord with the state , meeting General Jaruzelski and Catholic Primate Józef Glemp on 4 November . At the time of the regime 's re @-@ energized efforts to reduce Solidarity 's role , the Union had nearly ten million members ? almost four times as many as the ruling Party . Militant mood was displayed and unrealistic demands made at the meeting of the partially represented National Commission on 3 December , but the proceedings were wiretapped by the authorities , who broadcast the recordings previously manipulated to their advantage .

For its part the government , not consulting Solidarity , adopted a plan of economic measures that could only be implemented by force and asked parliament for extraordinary authority . In early December , Jaruzelski was pressured by his generals and colonels for an immediate forceful action and their demands were repeated at the Politburo meeting on 10 December . On 11 and 12 December Solidarity 's National Commission declared 17 December the day of countrywide protest . Neither the exhausted but radicalized Solidarity nor the ruling establishment was willing or able to back down and , in the era of Brezhnev , there could be no peaceful resolution to the situation that developed . The Soviets now expressed a preference for the conflict to be resolved by the Polish authorities , but Poland , according to Karol Modzelewski , was lucky to avoid a carnage of foreign intervention . Others , including the historian Antoni Dudek , feel that there was no sufficient justification for the imposition of martial law that followed .

= = = Imposition of martial law = = =

On 13 December 1981 , claiming that the country was on the verge of economic and civil breakdown , and alleging a danger of Soviet intervention , General Wojciech Jaruzelski began a crack @-@ down on Solidarity . Martial law was declared , the free labor union was suspended and most of its leaders detained . Several thousand citizens were interned or imprisoned and much larger numbers were subjected to various forms of harassment . Polish state militia (Milicja Obywatelska , the police) and paramilitary riot police ZOMO suppressed the strike action and demonstrations . Military forces entered industrial enterprises to clamp down on the independent union movement . A series of violent attacks included the pacification of Wujek Coal Mine during which 9 people were killed . The martial law offensive was directed primarily against workers and their Union ; they , rather than intelligentsia activists , were the object of the most brutal treatment . The authorities succeeded in imposing on members of Solidarity an individual and collective trauma , from which the broken mass movement would not be able to recover . The Catholic Church strove to exert on Solidarity a moderating influence both before and after the martial law .

Initially , the regime leadership intended to remold Solidarity into a compliant union , stripped of its intelligentsia advisers and compatible with the state socialist system . The failure to incite most ranking Solidarity leaders to collaborate , especially Wałęsa 's refusal to extend any cooperation along this course of action , resulted in the government adopting the goal of total liquidation of the union movement .

Strikes and protests followed , but were not nearly as widespread as those of August 1980 . The

last mass street demonstrations that Solidarity was able to muster occurred on 31 August 1982, the second anniversary of the Gdańsk agreements. The "Military Council of National Salvation" banned Solidarity officially on 8 October. Martial law was formally lifted in July 1983, though many heightened controls on civil liberties and political life, as well as food rationing, remained in place throughout the mid- to late 1980s. With all the restrictions, however, "the official cultural realm remained far more open than it was prior to 1980" and "cultural policy continued to be the most open in all of Eastern Europe". Among the concessions in the civil and political rights area granted by the troubled regime were the establishment of the Constitutional Tribunal in 1982 and of the Polish Ombudsman office in 1987.

In the mid- to late 1980s and even as late as 1987, Solidarity was seen by many, including most of its activists, as likely a thing of the past. It persisted solely as a rather small underground organization, supported by various international institutions, from the Catholic Church to the Central Intelligence Agency. When most senior Solidarity figures were interned or otherwise neutralized by the authorities, Zbigniew Bujak, head of the Union's Warsaw branch, remained in hiding and was the leader of the clandestine organization until his arrest in 1986. But the post-martial law general public showed signs of tiredness and disappointment, as it had become apparent that Solidarity was not a united front.

== "Market socialism" and systemic implosion ==

During the chaotic years of Solidarity and martial law, Poland entered a decade of economic crisis more pronounced than in Gierek's years. Work on the major unfinished projects that had begun in the 1970s drained the available investment outlays, little money was left for replacing obsolete production equipment and the manufactured goods were not competitive on the world market. Managerial ineffectiveness, bad organization of production and shortages of inputs and raw materials were among the factors that contributed to further deterioration of workers' morale. 640,000 people of productive age left the country between 1981 and 1988.

The regime of General Jaruzelski unsuccessfully tried various expedients to improve the performance of the economy. To gather foreign currency, the government established in all Polish cities a chain of state-run Pewex stores, where goods could only be bought with Western currency, as well as issued its own ersatz U.S. currency (złoty). The government allowed more small-scale private enterprises to function, departing further from the 'socialist' model of economy. Ideological considerations were abandoned and priority was given to pragmatic issues and moves. Searching for ways to improve the economy and conscious of its alienation from the industrial working class, the regime turned toward market reforms with an increasingly significant elite-oriented liberal (from the mid- to late 1980s) component. Marketization, formalized by a 1988 statute on economic activity, was a process that would continue past the mid- to late 1990s. Neoliberal processes may have been initiated by Deputy Prime Minister Zdzisław Sadowski and the government of Zbigniew Messner, then developed further under Minister Mieczysław Wilczek (author of the statute) and Mieczysław Rakowski's government. "Market socialism" was introduced, as the regime leaders actually lost their faith in the socialist system and even the nomenklatura managers were threatened by the declining economy. The enterprises were to be made independent, self-financing and self-managed, which included workers' councils that were resistant to restructuring. Owners of private businesses did well in the final years of the People's Republic and the number of such entities increased. Foreign investment was also encouraged, but limited marketization failed to deliver an economic turnaround. The practice of centralized economic decision making had not been overcome, while the newly autonomous enterprises moved toward a rather spontaneous, chaotic partial privatization of dubious legality that included elements of kleptocracy and had a significant middle-level nomenklatura component. On a more basic level, countless ordinary Poles took advantage of the changing attitudes and became involved in a great variety of income-producing activities.

The deepening economic crisis caused a marked deterioration in quality of life of ordinary citizens and resulted in increasing political instability. Rationing and queuing became a way of life, with

ration cards (kartki) necessary to buy basic consumer staples such as milk and sugar . As Western institutions were no longer willing to extend credit policies to the de facto bankrupt Polish government , access to goods the Poles needed became even more restricted . Most of the available scarce resources of Western currency had to be used to pay the crushing rates on Poland 's foreign debt , which reached US \$ 23 billion by 1980 and increased to US \$ 40 billion under General Jaruzelski . The government , which controlled all official foreign trade , responded by continuing to maintain a highly artificial exchange rate with Western currencies . The exchange rate worsened distortions in the economy at all levels , resulting in a growing black market and the development of a shortage economy . The omnipresent and destructive underground economy was characterized by phenomena such as bribery , waiting lists , speculation , direct exchanges between enterprises and large percentages of personal incomes deriving from secondary activities . Societal degradation was accompanied by unprecedented deterioration in the areas of biological environment and physical and mental health , which included steadily increasing mortality rates . In the late 1980s , the PZPR feared another social explosion because of high inflation , depressed living standards and deepening public anger and frustration . The authorities themselves , facing an increasingly disorderly and unmanageable system , felt perplexed and powerless .

= = = Politics of the People 's Republic 's last years and the transition period = = =

= = = = Toward Round Table and semi @-@ free elections = = = =

In September 1986 , the government declared a general amnesty and began work on a number of meaningful reforms . Given the liberalized political environment , Wa??sa was urged to reconvene the National Commission from the time of First Solidarity , but he refused , preferring to deal with the circle of Solidarity 's Expert Commission advisers . A National Executive Commission , led by Wa??sa , was openly established in October 1987 . Other opposition structures such as the Fighting Solidarity , the Federation of Fighting Youth , the Freedom and Peace Movement (Ruch Wolno?? i Pokój) and the Orange Alternative " dwarf " movement founded by " Major " Waldemar Fydrych began organizing street protests in form of colorful happenings that assembled thousands of participants . The liberal periodical Res Publica negotiated with the authorities its officially published release . In a political and economic referendum held in November 1987 , 67 % of the eligible voters participated and most of them approved the government @-@ proposed reforms , but a popular mandate was formally missed because of the unrealistically stringent passage requirements self @-@ imposed by the regime .

The ruling communist / military establishment slowly and gradually came to realize that a deal of some sort with the opposition would eventually be necessary and would have to include the leading Solidarity figures . Solidarity as such , a labor union representing workers ' interests , was unable to reassert itself after the martial law and later in the 1980s was practically destroyed , but preserved in the national consciousness as a myth that facilitated social acceptance of systemic changes previously deemed unthinkable . The Solidarity organization as a mass movement , and with it its dominant social democratic element (supporters of democratic socialism) , had been defeated . Solidarity 's name had continuously been used , but the opposition movement split to form rival groups of different political orientations . According to a new intellectual consensus , " democracy was grounded not in an active citizenry , as had been argued from the mid @-@ 1970s through 1981 , but in private property and a free market " . The current view no longer entailed broad political participation , emphasizing instead elite leadership and a capitalist economy . Solidarity became a symbolic entity , its activists openly assumed ideological " anti @-@ communist " positions and its leadership moved to the right . Solidarity was now represented by a small number of individuals , of whom Lech Wa??sa , Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Leszek Balcerowicz were about to assume particularly decisive roles . They were proponents of unfettered free market , strongly influenced by the American and West European financial and other interests .

Jaruzelski 's Poland depended on low @-@ cost deliveries of industrial staple commodities from the

Soviet Union and meaningful Polish reforms , economic or political , were not feasible during the rule of the last three conservative Soviet general secretaries . The perestroika and glasnost policies of the Soviet Union 's new leader , Mikhail Gorbachev , were therefore a crucial factor in stimulating reform in Poland . Gorbachev essentially repudiated the Brezhnev Doctrine , which had stipulated that attempts by its Eastern European satellite states to abandon the communist bloc would be countered by the Soviet Union with force . The developments in the Soviet Union altered the international situation and provided a historical opportunity for independent reforms in Poland . The hardline stance of US President Ronald Reagan was also helpful . David Ost stressed the constructive influence of Gorbachev . With his support for Polish and Hungarian membership in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and for the East European pluralistic evolution in general , the Soviet leader effectively pushed East Europe toward the West .

Nationwide strikes broke out in the spring and summer of 1988 . They were much weaker than the strikes of 1980 and were discontinued after the intervention by Wa??sa , who secured the regime 's commitment to begin negotiations with the opposition . The strikes were the last act of active political involvement of the working class in the history of People 's Poland and were led by young workers , not connected to Solidarity veterans and opposed to socially harmful consequences of the economic restructuring in progress at that time . According to the researcher Maciej Gdula , the political activity that followed was conducted exclusively by the elites . It was neither inspired by nor consulted with any mass social organization or movement , as the opposition leading circles freed themselves from their strong in the past commitment to the welfare of working people . No longer secure as undisputed leaders , Polish dissidents of the KOR @-@ Solidarity generations were eager to bargain with the weakened regime whose economic goals they now shared .

Both sides having been prompted by the new international situation and the recent strike wave in Poland , in September 1988 preliminary talks between government representatives and Solidarity leaders ensued in Magdalenka . Numerous meetings took place involving Wa??sa and the minister of internal affairs , General Czes?aw Kiszczak among others , at that time and in the following year , behind the scenes of the official negotiations conducted then . In November , Wa??sa debated on national TV Alfred Miodowicz , chief of the official trade unions . The encounter enhanced Wa??sa 's image .

During the PZPR 's plenary session of 16 ? 18 January 1989 , General Jaruzelski and his ruling formation overcame the Central Committee 's resistance by threatening to resign and the communist party decided to allow re @-@ legalization of Solidarity and to approach its leaders for formal talks . From 6 February to 4 April , 94 sessions of talks between 13 working groups , which became known as the " Round Table Talks " (Polish : Rozmowy Okr?g?ego Sto?u) , resulted in political and economic compromise reforms . Jaruzelski , Prime Minister Mieczys?aw Rakowski and Wa??sa did not directly participate in the negotiations . The government side was represented by Czes?aw Kiszczak , Aleksander Kwa?niewski , Janusz Reykowski and Stanis?aw Ciosek , the Solidarity opposition by Tadeusz Mazowiecki , Bronis?aw Geremek , Jacek Kuro? , Zbigniew Bujak , W?adys?aw Frasyniuk and Jaros?aw Kaczy?ski , among others . The talks resulted in the Round Table Agreement , by which political power was to be vested in a newly created bicameral legislature , and in a president who would be the chief executive .

By 4 April 1989 , numerous reforms and freedoms for the opposition were agreed . Solidarity , now in existence as the Solidarity Citizens ' Committee , was again to be legalized as a trade union and allowed to participate in semi @-@ free elections . This election had restrictions imposed , designed to keep the communists in power , since only 35 % of the seats in the Sejm , the key lower chamber of parliament , would be open to Solidarity candidates . The remaining 65 % were to be reserved for candidates from the PZPR and its allies (the United People 's Party , the Alliance of Democrats and the PAX Association) . Since the Round Table Agreement mandated only reform (not replacement) of " real socialism " in Poland , the communist party thought of the election as a way of neutralizing political conflict and staying in power , while gaining some legitimacy to carry out economic reforms . However , the negotiated social policy determinations , arrived at by economists and trade unionists during the Round Table talks , were quickly tossed out by both the Party and the opposition .

A systemic transformation happening sooner rather than later was made possible by the Polish

legislative elections of 4 June 1989 , which coincided with the bloody crackdown on the Tiananmen Square protesters in China . When the results of the voting were released , a political earthquake followed . The victory of Solidarity surpassed all predictions . Solidarity candidates captured all the seats they were allowed to compete for in the Sejm , while in the newly established Senate they captured 99 out of the 100 available seats (the other seat went to an independent , who later switched to Solidarity) . At the same time , many prominent PZPR candidates failed to gain even the minimum number of votes required to capture the seats that were reserved for them . The communists suffered a catastrophic blow to their legitimacy .

= = = Political transformation = = =

The next few months were spent on political maneuvering . The increasingly insecure communists , who still had military and administrative control over the country , were appeased by a compromise in which Solidarity allowed General Jaruzelski to remain head of state . Jaruzelski barely won the vote in the National Assembly presidential election of 19 July 1989 , even though his name was the only one on the ballot . He won through an informally arranged abstention by a sufficient number of Solidarity MPs and his position was not strong . Jaruzelski resigned as first secretary of the PZPR on 29 July .

The Round Table deal basically allowed the PZPR to remain in power regardless of the election results , and the Party 's reshuffled leadership continued to rule . On 1 August , prices were freed because of the ongoing market reforms and hyperinflation resulted . The instantly increased economic hardship caused a new wave of strikes . The strikes were spontaneous , but the Solidarity leaders , no longer in agreement with the strikers ' economic demands , were able to emphasize the secondary political aspect of the strikes (anger at the Party 's obstinacy) and use them to pressure the regime for an expedited transfer of power . The new prime minister , General Kiszczak , who was appointed on 2 August 1989 , failed to gain enough support in the Sejm to form a government and resigned on 19 August . He was the last communist head of government in Poland . Although Jaruzelski tried to persuade Solidarity to join the PZPR in a " grand coalition " , Wa??sa refused . The two formerly subservient parties allied with the PZPR , prompted by the current strike pressure , were moving toward adopting independent courses and their added votes would give the opposition control of parliament . Under the circumstances , Jaruzelski had to come to terms with the prospect of new government being formed by political opposition . Solidarity elected representative Tadeusz Mazowiecki was appointed prime minister and confirmed by the Assembly on 24 August 1989 . The new government led by a non @-@ communist , the first of its kind in the Soviet Bloc , was sworn into office on 13 September . The communist party did not immediately relinquish all power , remaining in the coalition and retaining control of the ministries of foreign trade , defense , interior and transport .

Mazowiecki 's government , forced to deal quickly with galloping hyperinflation , soon adopted radical economic policies , proposed by Leszek Balcerowicz , which transformed Poland into a functioning market economy under an accelerated schedule . Many Polish state owned enterprises , undergoing privatization , turned out to be woefully unprepared for capitalist competition and the pace of their accommodation (or attrition) was rapid . The economic reform , a shock therapy accompanied by comprehensive neoliberal restructuring , was in reality an extension of the previous incremental " communist " policies of the 1970s and 1980s , which were now followed by a leap to greatly expanded integration with the global economy with little protection . Among the reform 's negative immediate effects were the economic recession and near @-@ paralysis of foreign trade . On longer @-@ term bases , the country experienced quickly rising unemployment and social inequities , as enterprises were liquidated and income was redistributed away from workers and farmers , in favor of the establishment and the entrepreneurial class . A collapse of Polish industry was among the detrimental consequences of fundamental and lasting importance . Labor unions underwent further marginalization ; Solidarity activity as a labor union , prioritized in the past , was now suppressed . On the positive side , inflation was brought under control , the currency stabilized , shortages were eliminated and significant foreign investment began . The shock therapy solutions

were often dictated by Western consultants , of whom Jeffrey Sachs was best known but also most criticized .

The striking electoral victory of Solidarity candidates in the limited elections , and the subsequent formation of the first non @-@ communist government in the region in decades , encouraged many similar peaceful transitions from communist party rule in Central and Eastern Europe in the second half of 1989 .

In December 1989 , changes to the Polish constitution were made , officially eliminating the " socialist " order : Marxist references were removed and the name of the country was changed back to the Polish Republic .

Wa??sa , president of the Solidarity trade union , demanded early presidential elections acting against the advice of his traditional Solidarity allies , intellectuals who were now running the government . Under pressure from the continuing worker unrest Wa??sa declared himself a supporter of workers ' interests , allegedly threatened by those whom he identified as communists (such as President Jaruzelski) or elitist political liberals (such as Prime Minister Mazowiecki) . Wa??sa presented himself as a person of good conservative , Christian and nationalist credentials .

In 1990 , Jaruzelski resigned as Poland 's president and was succeeded by Wa??sa , who won the 1990 presidential elections . Lech Wa??sa 's inauguration as president took place on 22 December 1990 ; he accepted the prewar presidential insignia from the stepping down President @-@ in @-@ Exile Ryszard Kaczorowski , distancing himself from Wojciech Jaruzelski . Wa??sa defeated Mazowiecki and in the second round Stanis?aw Tympi?ski , but under his presidency economic policy remained unchanged .

The communist Polish United Workers ' Party dissolved itself in 1990 and transformed into the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland . The Warsaw Pact was formally dissolved on 1 July 1991 ; the Soviet Union ceased to exist in December 1991 and the last post @-@ Soviet troops left Poland in September 1993 . On 27 October 1991 , the first entirely free Polish parliamentary elections since the 1920s took place . This completed Poland 's transition from a communist party rule to a Western @-@ style liberal democratic political system .