CHAPTER IV

POLISH CRISIS - FACTORS, NATURE AND SOVIET RESPONSE

The Polish People’s Republic was one of the countries where socialism had graphically demonstrated its transforming abilities and mighty dynamism resulting in quite impressive improvement of the economy, culture and People’s living standard.

Poland, before the socialist revolution, was a backward, predominantly agrarian country, with more than 60 percent population living in the countryside. The working class numbered a mere million with just as many permanently unemployed. No other country in Europe retained its semi-feudal structure so tenaciously and had such social contrasts as in Poland. Forty-four percent of land was owned by landlords, and there were four million landless peasants. A quarter of the population was absolutely illiterate.

Poland lost forty percent of national wealth to Nazi during the Second World War. The Poles fought shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet army for the liberation of their country. At the end of the War the country lay in ruins. This was the point when socialism came in Poland, partly as a result of the national liberation struggle against the Nazi occupation and partly due to the designs of the Soviet Union which had emerged as a major power after its victory over Germany.

The large scale industries was made national property. The peasants took possession of landed estates, by working hard the Poles succeeded in regaining good production level by the beginnings of the 1950s. In the next twenty years Polish People’s Republic made a giant stride forward. The factors and forces which secured such a giant stride forward in the first half of the 1970s generated serious setbacks
in the subsequent five year period and witnessed severe economic crisis which continued to drag the same situation throughout 1980s. In response to the crisis Poland witnessed workers unrest and this unrest later on developed into an revolutionary movement of the workers during 1980s and fought vigorously against the system responsible for the crisis.

GENESIS

On 28 June 1956 workers of the Stalin engineering group in Poznan came out on the streets to protest at their worsening economic situation. This was the first time when the Polish workers had stood up for their rights against the Communist regime. Poznan thus gave birth to a potent myth linking ideas of freedom, the workers freedom from want and the nation’s freedom from foreign domination.

In 1970-71, price increase had been the signal for mass strike and demonstrations in the coastal shipyard cities. The number of workers then killed by the security forces ran into hundreds. The workers’ upsurge had brought down the previous regime, under Gomulka and Gierek, whom Gomulka’s downfall had catapulted to power, did not wish to repeat his predecessor’s mistake. The policies followed by both leaders have been discussed later in this chapter.

There were once again the workers’ riots in Ursus and Radom in June 1976, in protest against drastic increase in the price of basic foodstuff, which left Gierek

---


regime badly shaken.³ For several months afterwards the government conveyed the impression of being totally disoriented. The objectionable price increases were hastily revoked, but the authorities insisted that they were still necessary and would have to be reintroduced at a later date. The regime agreed for closer consultation but severe repression were resorted against demonstrators. In Radom, particularly, fierce repression followed the strike and riots where hundreds of workers were sacked, arrested and tortured. It was a crisis which was more than simply economic in its dimensions. The workings of the system affronted the moral sense and intelligence, not only of many intellectuals, but also of an increasingly sophisticated working class.⁴ While on the hand, Poland’s rulers insisted on their power-monopoly and went to the extent of even writing it in the Constitution of 1976, they were widely seen by the longer citizenry as revoltingly greedy, corrupt and deeply contemptuous of society;⁵ on the other hand, Gierek’s regime preserved the system through its police and censorship powers. It was quite natural, therefore, that the public support for Gierek and confidence in his government should have declined notably.

It was only late in the year 1970s that the Gierek regime regained its composure and tried to come to grips with the problems. To cope with the deteriorating situation the so called "New Economic Manoeuvre" was adopted.⁶ This

⁵ ibid, p.13.
was directed as much toward the preservation of calm in the country as to economic recovery. The government had overestimated the speed with which it could accomplish economic recovery. In October 1977 the Central Committee met to review the results of the new economic manoeuvre. Gierek's whose mood was sober, criticised the economy for inefficiency and insufficient coordination among its various branches, but he proposed no new measures to cope with those problems. Consequently, throughout 1978 economic conditions continued to worsen. Price increases of basic foodstuffs were officially postponed but they were carried out in practice. Prices of various commodities were increased under the guise of improving their quality and special commercials shops with quality assortment of goods at steeply higher costs were introduced all over the country. Thus many essential commodities still remained beyond the reach of the ordinary public. At the same time, Poland's heavy debt to various western countries at the end of the 1978 stood at $14.8 billion in long term and about $2 billion in short-term credits. This drastically reduced the country's imports and also compelled it to export many goods badly needed at home.7 Despite the signs that the factors of the crisis had reached beyond specific policies into the heart of the economic system, the Gierek regime had stubbornly resisted introducing into it any basic changes.

After coming into power in 1970, Gierek had adopted a new political style which tried to emphasise greater respect on the part of the communist authorities for

citizens' rights and a readiness to enter into dialogue with the Polish people.\textsuperscript{8} This was coupled with his aim and objective to improve the standard of living. These measured had initially won for Gierek a genuine popular sympathy.

But in the mid 1970s he returned to the more orthodox communist policies. There was a tightening of religious freedom and due to that the church-state relations deteriorated visibly. Cultural freedom was also curbed and in early 1976, amendments to the Polish Constitution were introduced, bringing it closer to the Soviet Constitution.\textsuperscript{9} Obviously this soon followed by massive protests by the Polish intelligentsia. As a result of these anti-democratic measures, undertaken by the government as the goodwill for it among various segments of the society largely squandered.

The persecution of the Ursus and Radom workers, after the government had withdrawn the controversial food price increases, were the last straw. At that stage various discontented groups formed into a united opposition. There was nothing new about the state response. The cases of the victimised workers were taken up by a small number of dissident intellectuals. A new group, the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR), was formed to raise funds for and publicise the case of those victimised.

\textsuperscript{8} Adam Bromke, "Poland Under Gierek, A New Political Style", \textit{Problems of Communism}, vol.21, no.5, September-October 1972, p.76.

\textsuperscript{9} Bromke, n.6, p.6.
The largest and also the most active group in KOR consisted of leaders of the 1968 student rebellion.\textsuperscript{10} KOR's initial aims were modest. Its first communiques reported on the persecutions of the imprisoned workers and announced public campaigns to raise funds for medical and legal aid. Gradually, the committee's goal became more ambitious. They came to include the amnesty for all the imprisoned workers, their reinstatement in the same position they had held before June 1976 and punishments to those police officers who had abused their powers.

The government responded to the KOR by adopting the method of concessions and repressions. Special efforts were made to appease the Catholic church. Conciliatory gestures were also made towards the intellectuals. Some overtures were made towards workers too. For instance, Gierek visited Ursus and promised clemency for the imprisoned workers.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed most of them were released but five workers still stayed in prison. On 7 May 1977, Stanislaw Pyjas, a Cracow student and an active supporter of KOR, was found dead. Students all over the country rose in protest. The government responded by promptly arresting ten persons. This led to new protests from the intellectuals and the church hierarchy. On 23 July 1977, the six people and the remaining five workers were all released from the imprisonment.

The opposition activities, however, did not stop there. On 29 September 1977, the Committee for the Defence of Workers announced its transformation into a permanent body called Committee for Social Self-Defense - (KOR-KSS). The goals of


\textsuperscript{11} ibid, p.554.
KOR-KSS were defined as combating violations of the law, fighting for institutional guarantees of civil rights and assisting in all similar social initiatives.12

The committee demonstrated that there was room in contemporary Poland for successful political action. By standing up to the communist authorities, KOR overcame the political inertia among various segments of Polish society and its example led to the proliferation of similar activities in many other spheres of life.13

At the time of the demonstration in Cracow in May 1977, the Students Solidarity Committee (SKS) spontaneously came into existence. It declared its objective to replace the communist dominated student organisation with a body that truly represented the Polish students. At about the same time the first issue of Robotnik (the worker), pledged to strike for the replacement of the official trade unions with genuine workers’ representation. On 20 October 1977, a declaration of the domestic movement, signed by 110 people, was published in Sanuzdat paper, and Golas (the voice). The declaration observed with satisfaction that, in the preceding two years, communists attempts to break the movement had not only failed but had made it more popular, and that it now had thousands of adherents. The time had come, the declaration stated for the democratic movement to undertake the struggle for Poland’s democracy and sovereignty.14

So far the opposition activities had not only confined to the intellectuals, students, youths and workers but spread to the wider section of Polish society. Two

13 Bromke, n.8, p.10.
14 Bromke, n.6, p.12.
attempts to organise a free trade union movement - the first in Katowice in February 1978 and the second in Gdansk the following April - were both met with immediate and severe reprisals. Yet, in December, workers' demonstration commemorating the eighth anniversary of their rebellion against the Gomulka regime were staged in Gdansk. Also, there was evidence of swelling unrest among the peasants. In protest against what they considered an unsatisfactory pension scheme, the farmers in some scattered parts of the country organised peasants self-defense committees and threatened to stop deliveries of their produce.15

There were the socio-political and economic factors and forces which provided great impetus for the birth of solidarity to fight out Polish crisis. The Solidarity movement was essentially a nation wide movement which was struggling for the democratization of society.

CRISIS: FACTORS AND NATURE

After the collapse of the six-year plan (1950-55), the 'Stalinists' were blamed. After Wladyslaw Gomulka fell from power in December 1970 because of his economic policies, now it was the turn of Edward Gierek and his advisers who had to face criticism because they were at fault. To be sure, all these leadership groups did in fact greatly contribute to the economic difficulties, through their arbitrary decisions, their unwillingness to listen to criticism, and their incompetence. However, the real roots of the crisis go much deeper than mere failure of leadership.

The crisis was not caused by the strikes and labour unrest; on the contrary, the strikes and the establishment of the free labour unions grew out of a rapidly

accelerating economic crisis with which the government and party leaders were unable to cope. The real causes of Poland’s economic crisis lay in the system itself. The Soviet-type economic system had been implanted in Poland since the late 1940 and early 1950s, and its salient features were well known.16

One such feature had been the overcentralization inherent in the Soviet-type command economy. The command economy had many advantages. It could enforce a high degree of mobilization of resources, it could ensure full utilization of those resources, and it could direct the allocation of resources toward the fulfillment of selected quantitative targets. But it could ensure efficiency.17

Another feature had been the Soviet development model, with its strong element of autarky. The developmental strategy concentrated on the expansion of industry, especially those branches that produced producer goods required for the domestic investment programme. But these priority industries were all capital, energy, and material intensive ones which required imports at a time when no viable export sector had been created. The developmental strategy played down agriculture, consumer goods, and the socio-economic infrastructure (the so called non-productive sphere). Thus, some traditional Polish exports produced by low-priority sectors were neglected, and several traditional markets were lost. A potential balance-of-payments crisis was inherent from the very beginning.18


18 Z.M.Fallenbucht, "Policy Alternatives in Polish Foreign Economic Relations", in (continued...)

124
A third feature had been the reorientation of Poland's foreign economic relations toward the Soviet Union. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Poland's trade with the West declined dramatically, both relatively and absolutely and trade with the other countries of Eastern Europe. Under the Soviet pressure, Poland had to withdraw from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IBRD) and to reject Marshall Plan aid. Thus, the capital required for post-war reconstruction and industrialization could not be obtained from abroad, and at the same time there was a net outflow of capital from Poland and other East European countries to the Soviet Union. Poland was increasingly isolated from the world economy.

During the first industrialization drive of the early 1950s, the combined impact of the over-centralized economic system, the developmental strategy, and the redirection of economic relations put distinctive stamp on the Polish economy. To use recent Soviet and East European terminology in which rates of growth depended primarily on increase in the quantity of inputs rather than on increase in the productivity of inputs. A top-heavy industrial structure arose, geared to extensive development and a relatively high degree of autarky. Iron and Steel, heavy machinery, metal working, chemicals, transport equipment and other branches typical of 19th

18(...continued)


century industrialization were given priority. Much of Poland’s industrial output consisted of goods which were profitable only if produced on a large scale and which were sensitive to technological progress and must therefore be continuously modernized.

The result was high operating costs, which made many plants and sometimes entire industries unproductive. This kind of inefficiency was perhaps the inevitable consequence of imposing a Soviet-type economic system and developmental strategy and forcing an unnatural reorientation of trade pattern on a country that differed greatly from the Soviet Union in terms of size, self-sufficiency, and political and cultural traditions.\(^{21}\)

No doubt, serious disturbances in the Polish economy appeared within a few years, specially by the mid 1950s. As a result, there was a change in party leadership in October 1956. The new PUWP first Secretary was Władysław Gomulka, whose ascendancy led many Poles to hope for a more liberal regime.\(^{22}\)

In the economy, certain changes were pushed through straightaway. Grain and food stuff were imported on Western credits in order to improve the standard of living, which had fallen during industrialization and collectivization drive. The rate of investment was reduced, and some investment was redirected toward agriculture, consumer goods industries and infrastructure. Some bold proposals for systemic modifications were discussed, but no lasting reforms followed.

\(^{21}\) ibid, p.137.

\(^{22}\) ibid, p.130.
In the event, palliatives were not sufficient to improve the overall efficiency of the Polish economy. Moreover, after a temporary period of readjustment after 1956, the same development strategy was continued. A new industrialization drive started in 1960, which built on and extended the industrial structure created during the 1950s. Gomulka's plan was to restructure and modernize the economy on the basis of domestic accumulation (forced saving), but this approach fouled badly. By the late 1960s, the economy was again caught in a vicious circle of stagnation.23

In 1970 the country was facing severe economic dislocation and, in an attempt to combat this, on 12 December 1970, an immediate increase in food prices was announced just before Christmas festivities. On 14 December workers in Gdansk and Gdynia went on strike and marched into the centre of the city. On the same day a clash between strikers and the forces of law and order ended with at least 75 strikers being killed.24 The party attempted to cover up the details of the conflict but it failed. Poland by mid-December was once more on the verge of rebellion; strikers in Szczecin were calling for independent trade unions and the establishment of parallel administration.

Gomulka had ordered the repression at Gdansk and elsewhere and his inclination was for the use of more and greater force to contain the revolt. The Kremlin did not agree and intervened to urge the need for a political solution. For the nationalist communist Gomulka, Soviet dictation of internal Polish policies was too

much; he became apoplectic, metaphorically and literally. On December 20, 1970 he was replaced as first secretary by Edward Gierek, who had a much more open and relaxed style than his predecessor.25

The economic crisis was believed to be the most serious reason behind the Polish crisis. Poland had witnessed in the early 1970s an impressive economic, primarily industrial growth rate and living standards of the Poles automatically increased. The 1971-75 period was marked by a rapid increase in the national income, it went up by 59 percent. But the next five year period saw a sharp decline in its growth rate to less than one-eighth. Farming, too, was affected by negative trends. In 1980, gross agricultural output fell to 90 percent of the 1975 level. Obviously such a situation in industry and agriculture seriously held up the growth of real wages of factory and office workers.26

The main reason for this drastic contrast between the first and second five-year periods of the 1970s was as Polish communists acknowledged, a totally erroneous "accelerated development strategy" proposed by the party and state leadership headed by Gierek. Its key was large-scale import of capital and technology from the west.27 Its essence was that an increase in investment was necessary to restructure and modernize the economy but that a simultaneous increase in consumption was

25 ibid, pp.359-60.
26 Vadim Trubnikov, "The Polish Crisis Who was to Blame", Socialism, vol.8, no.7, August 1984, pp.21-22.
27 ibid, p.22.
necessary to create incentives, without which it would be difficult to expect improvements in labour productivity.\textsuperscript{28}

The Polish regime opted for a short cut to attain higher living standards for its people. They were not for a rapid solution of the food problem and a better nutrition standard for the population, without carrying out socio-economic changes in the countryside. It was decided to be done through a massive import of grain and other fodder crops from the West, to raise beef cattle, mostly on private farms. In 1970-76, the imports on credits were increased from 2.5 to 6 million tonnes. The results showed that the per capita meat consumption went up by a record 30 percent, but the price was very high. This resulted in heavy indebtedness to the western banks.\textsuperscript{28}

The strategy of attaining a higher standard of living using short cut fell through. An appreciable proportion of Poland’s debt amounting, in 1971-80, to an enormous sum of 21,500 million dollars was to the developed capitalist countries. Thus, living on credit was increasingly becoming a part of the Polish life style. There were many flaws in this ambitious strategy. In foreign trade, for example, the way in which the planners tried to insulate the economy from the impact of the world wide stagflation contributed to significant economic difficulties. Thus, the accelerated development strategy brought the country to the point of a grave economic crisis.\textsuperscript{30}

The precipitant cause for the Polish crisis was, however, to be found in the realm of political economy. In 1979, it was officially admitted that the in national

\textsuperscript{28} Fallenbuchi, n.16, p.5.
\textsuperscript{29} Trubnikov, n.26, p.24.
\textsuperscript{30} ibid, p.25.
income declined for the first time in the history of the people's Poland. The Prime Minister Edward Babiuch announced a plan to reduce and remove Poland's trade deficit. This would involve a 25 percent increase in exports, while supplies to the domestic market would have to be cut by 15 percent in the last quarter of 1980 and some increase in food price also was now unavoidable. The Politburo decided to introduce the price rise in a covert way, by transferring better quality meat to the so-called commercial butchers where prices were already much higher. The workers realised the sleight-of-hand of the government.

The great crisis of 1980, like so many previous upheavals in communist Poland, was triggered by price increases. On 1 July a new pricing system for meat was introduced. Although it was not universally applied, it had an immediate impact by provoking a rash of strikes, the first being in the Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw. The authorities rushed more meat into the shops, conceded a number of wage increases, and attempted to use censorship to prevent the spread of the unrest. These efforts failed and by the end of the first week of August 1980 there had been over 150 work stoppages throughout the country. The focal point of agitation was Gdansk. On 14 August workers in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk struck work over the dismissal of a crane driver. This time strikes were strengthened by the inter-factory strike committee (IFSCs), which had emerged in August to coordinate action and to

31 ibid, p.26.
32 Crampton, n.24, p.366.
maintain discipline and order. It was on the basis of the IFSCs that the strikers wished to build the free trade unions which they were now demanding.\(^{33}\)

Although, the economic crisis, as one of the many factors, was vital and the most responsible factor in inciting the workers to demand for large scale changes in the political and economic system, but other factors, too played important role in bringing awareness, confidence and solidarity among the working class.\(^{34}\)

The Polish People's Republic was in the throes of the most serious crisis at the beginning of 1980s. The crisis simply did not reflect the erroneous policies of the regime, but struck at the roots of the system itself. Poland had witnessed workers unrest even before 1980, but protest of 1980 differed from the earlier ones by having embraced all important sections of the working class. It is relevant to note here that the strikers in 1956 had covered only certain large plants in big industrial centres and those of 1970, the coastal region only. In 1956, the protest had taken the form of spontaneous and open demonstration in the streets of Poznan and Warsaw. Similarly, in 1970, it was guided by strike committee, but the unrest under the leadership of the Solidarity was much wider in its impact and following.\(^{35}\) The methodology of protest in the early 1980s was different in the sense that it consisted of sitdown strikes. The organization was excellent and so was the discipline of the strikers.\(^{36}\)

---

33 ibid, p.367.
34 ibid, p.369.
35 Trubnckov, n.26, p.23.
36 ibid, p.27.
A good number of interpretations of Polish events in the early 1980s proceeded from the assumption that they were social conflicts that symbolised nothing but the rejection by working class of socialists principles and a vote for the capitalists system of values. However, a different, though typically official appraisal of the workers' action is contained in the documents of the ninth extraordinary Congress of Polish United Workers Party held in July 1981. It described the events of 1980-82 a protest against socialism but against violation of its principle; not against people's power, but against inappropriate methods of management; not against the party but against mistakes in the policy of its leaders.\(^37\)

The Polish crisis of 1980-81 was not caused simply by growing economic misery and exploitation. According to Tocqueville, "the crisis tend to happen not when things have been getting worse but when things have been getting better."\(^38\)

The Gierek regime had raised the material expectations of the Poles to a level which it could not possibly satisfy.

The economic crisis was therefore a necessary but by no means the sole cause of workers' revolt. The decisive causes of the Polish upsurge were to be found in the realm of consciousness of the people rather than their being.\(^39\)

**COURSE OF THE MOVEMENT**

The Solidarity was primarily a trade union. It never made an attempt to bring about a revolution, nor did it ever made any attempt to take over the state. In Marxist

\(^{37}\) ibid, p.24.

\(^{38}\) Ash, n.15, p.32.

\(^{39}\) ibid, p.275.
terms, the working class did not seize state power. For more than a year the Solidarity and the party-state existed side by side, in the condition which Trotsky described as ‘Dual power’. The Solidarity was broadly a non-violent organisation, its leaders never imagined that they could achieve what all previous insurrections had set out to achieve, i.e., independent statehood. At most, they imagined that they might achieve a Republic which was largely self-governing in its internal affairs.40

Another novel aspect of this movement deserves a mention, when the Solidarity called a warning strike, it was followed in the remotest corners of the country, in the small towns like buffet and the villages like Ursus or Huta Warszawa. From July 1980, KOR (the Committee for the Defense of Workers) activists started telephoning news of the first strikes through the automatic exchanges to foreign radio stations, which broadcast the news back to Poland. In this sense, the movement or strikes conducted by the Solidarity utilized the modern communication system until army cut those nationwide communication system at one stroke.

From the later part of 1970s, the Polish economy had started getting into bad shape. Moreover, the increase in the intensity was accompanied by a simultaneous rise of highly powerful, sophisticated and advanced working class movement. In the early 1970s, there was almost an economic boom in Poland, massive investment projects were undertaken with the help of western credits. But, by the middle of the 1970s, the signs of incipient crisis began to appear. On 24 June 1976, in an attempt to minimise the crisis, the regime under Gierek announced an enhancement in food

40 ibid, p.278.
prices. As a result, the strikes and riots erupted immediately in some parts of Poland like, Warsaw and Ursus.41

Between June 1976 and the summer of 1980, there were something like thousand strikes in Polish work place, mostly on the issue of immediate economic demands. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that these strikes were typically successful in achieving their immediate aims. In working class circles, the call for institutional change expressed itself, with growing strength, as a demand for workers to have their own organisations independent of the regime. The newspaper widened the circles of KOR's working class contacts who began to organise themselves in local groups demanding free trade unions and, from 1979, the workers charters were drafted by KOR.42

On 1 July 1980, the government announced a new round of price increase of essential commodity. On the very day the price increase was announced the departments of the Ursus factory went on strike, next day the strikes spread further. However, these strikes were settled quite rapidly with pay increase. But on the fourth day, some sections at Ursus went on strike again on the grounds that the pay increase was not enough.43 As far as the regime was concerned, it seems to have given an impression to the Polish working class that militancy would pay. In a synthetic textiles factory at Bieruch Stary, the 170 workers who participated in a

41  Fellenbuchi, n.16, pp.5-6.
strike got a pay increase of 20 percent, the 1,830 non-strikers did not. A new joke circulated in Warsaw: those who do not strike shall not eat meat. A government communique now made the first reference to anxiety among friends, in an attempt to use the fear of possible Russian intervention as a brake on the workers movements.

It was a small group of workers around the KOR paper, costal workers, who finally put paid to the regime's dreams to put an end to the strike wave. The group decided that the time was right for calling a nation-wide strike, and not just in the Lenin shipyard. They worked out a joint plan of action, and prepared posters and leaflets for use on August 14, 1980. Every one of them had a previous history of involvement in the activities and discussions of the free trade union movement. A strike committee had been elected, including Lech Walesa, who had climbed over the walls to address the striking workers. The strike committee had formulated demands including the release of political prisoners, the reinstatement of sacked workers, and the erection of the monument at the shipyard gates of the workers murdered by the regime in 1970. In negotiations, the management had agreed to the demands for the monuments and for the reinstatement of Walesa and Walentynowics, to family allowances in line with the militia and a 1,200 Zloty monthly pay rise. As to other demands they had declared their competence to negotiate. The talks, however, broke down.

News of the occupation strike at the Lenin Ship Yard spread fast in Gdansk-Gdynia area. The next morning again the leadership of members of the costal worker

44 ibid, p.35.

45 ibid, p.36.
groups of more work places joined the strike. Other shipbuilding enterprises including the Paris Commune shipyards at Gdynia, the docks, local transport workers and others also joined. The strike reached a crucial turning point on 16 August 1980. Negotiations in Lenin Shipyard seemed to produce an agreement. Indeed, Walesa was prevailed upon to announce the end of the occupation-strike over the yards tannoy system. The tram drivers, in solidarity with the general movement, had just refused the biggest pay raise in their lives. Walesa, perhaps in his greatest moment as a workers’ leader, did a swift about turn and declared the continuation of the strike.46 The representatives from 22 striking work places established a new body: the inter-enterprise strike committee, the MKS.

Over the weekend, the MKS members drew up their list of demands. Initially they included calls for free elections to the Sejm and for the abolition of censorship, but on the advice of a local KOR member, Bogdan Borusenucz, they dropped these as unrealistic. The final list contained 21 points. It is notable that it was only with renewal of strike and the formation of the MKS that the strikers demands ceased to have a largely local and economic character. Now their demands began with those for institutional changes: for free trade union, freedom of speech and information. Having found in the Inter-Enterprise Committee - a form of organisation that overcome industrial and regime-imposed divisions in their own ranks, the workers began to articulate their full voice. For the first time, the regime was having to deal with a powerfully organised working class.47


47 ibid, p.45.
Once the MKS began formal negotiations with the government representatives, significant changes in the internal organization of the Gdansk workers’ committee began to appear. Inter Enterprise Committee had been established as a highly democratic body.\textsuperscript{48} The factory delegates elected an executive presidium, which initially met with them in plenary session twice a day in the main hall of the Lenin Shipyard. The main, formal talks between the government’s team and the presidium were held in front of microphones. A few presidium and government representatives met, together with two teams of academic experts who had been brought in as advisers. On 27 August 1980, the government side told the MKS that their demand for independent unions would become an ideological precedent.

On 31 August 1980, Jagiebski and Walesa signed an agreement, among its provisions, the agreement sanctioned the creation of Solidarity as an independent traded union, the right of the union to go on strike, promised liberal changes in the existing law of censorship, consented to the radio-broadcast of Sunday masses, broadcast of Solidarity’s ‘points of view’ on important social matters, shortened the work week to five days and guaranteed the release of political prisoners. Immediately after the demands were accepted, Walesa declared the strike as over.\textsuperscript{49}

The workers’ ability to win many of their economic demands without great difficulty enhanced their confidence. This enabled them to further expand the horizons of their aspirations. At the same time, they insisted on the working class character of their movement and adopted the name solidarity for it. The workers’

\textsuperscript{48} Stangiszkis, n.42, p.48.

\textsuperscript{49} Stangiszkis, n.42, p.49.
movement called itself 'trade union', but its demands covered such areas as censorship and access to the mass media, the fate of political prisoners, religious freedom, the abolition of privilege for the civil and secret police.\textsuperscript{50}

Agreement had been arrived at between the Inter-Enterprise Strike Committee and the regime. Time and again, national and local sections of the ruling class of Poland attempted to prevent the application of these agreements. A review of public opinion surveys and workers' memories from Summer of 1980 suggests that the great majority of Poles now saw their society in terms of a simple division between 'we' and 'they' which included all those hierarchical authority. On 17 September, representatives of 35 MKS met in Gdansk and decided, after some debate, to establish a single national union. All the major industrial centres were represented at the initial meeting; the core of Solidarity membership, the overwhelming majority of the industrial workers from the big plants, had already joined.\textsuperscript{51} By early October, 1980 its membership was six million. Solidarity became an extensively organised workers' movements in the world.

On 3 October 1980, there occurred the first organised strike in the history of the People's Poland. The new national coordination committee of Solidarity, concerned at the slow progress at local level towards both union recognition and the settlement of claims, organised a highly effective one hour 'warning strike' across Poland.\textsuperscript{52} In some areas, even restaurants and cafes closed their door for an hour.

\textsuperscript{50} ibid, p.51.

\textsuperscript{51} Ash, n.15, p.75.

The regime placed new obstacles in the solidarity’s path. The union’s national commission submitted its draft statutes for registration as a legal body at Warsaw court, only to be told on 24 October that the judge had unilaterally amended them to include reference to the party’s leading role.\textsuperscript{53}

The Solidarity’s leadership told the government that they would go on strike on 12 November 1980 unless an appeal to the supreme court succeeded. At a meeting in Szczecin factory delegates voted in favour of strike. The Solidarity’s Statutes were accepted. During the victory celebrations, cardinal Wyszyenski cautioned Walesa to refrain from temptations to engage in political activity and urged him to concentrate on occupational and social tasks. He called on the workers to show patience and understanding, warning them even the best organised state could not give what it did not have.\textsuperscript{54}

On 19 March 1981 occurred Bydgoszcz incident. The Solidarity activists were brutally beaten up by security police at the end of a meeting in the local council offices. Within hours there were two hours warning strikes in the region. The Solidarity National Commission meeting in Bydgoszcz in an emergency session decided to call a four hour warning strike on 27 March, and a full general strike on the following Tuesday, the 31st March, if the demands were not met. They also demanded the arrest and punishment of those responsible for what happened at Bydgoszcz. The four-hour warning strike on 27 March was immensely successful.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} ibid, p.20.


\textsuperscript{55} ibid, p.112.
The Polish workers were preparing for the general strike, then suddenly, the general strike was cancelled. In emergency talks in Warsaw, Walesa and a handful of the union’s advisors had won a government promise that those responsible for the events at Bydgoszcz would be punished, after due process of law; that the Rural Solidarity would get legal recognition as a union; and that Solidarity could publish a weekly newspaper, etc. This was totally unexpected, and provoked a major row inside the union. After the Bydgoszcz events, it seemed clear that there was a serious demobilisation of Solidarity membership. Yet, the Bydgoszcz events were a crucial turning point in the history of the Polish workers movement.56

In a trade union poll at the beginning of March 1981, 68 percent of the members thought that the Solidarity should set up new self-management bodies to replace the discredited conference and in the largest plants 95 percent were in favour of this. A grouping called ‘Network’ was initiated by the Solidarity militants from a number of the large enterprises which had been selected as strike headquarters during the Bydgoszcz crisis.

The summer of 1981 saw a new, potentially more radical, tendency emerge within the Solidarity, the "Lublin Group". Initiated by the union activists from Lublin and Lodz, it attracted people dissatisfied with the network moderate perspectives. The Lublin group agreed with the network leaders over the need to create social enterprise, but emphasised more strongly that leading people in social and political organisations should not be allowed to sit on workers’ councils. The directors subordinated to workers council constitute the real power in the enterprise. From the

56 ibid, pp.202-4.
summer of 1981, however, the workers' committees began fighting to control the selection of directors, which contributed to the revival of an open conflict.57

The Airline workers strike was but one example of a sudden and marked revival of open struggle between workers and the regime. This had happened after the party congress. In July 1981 there were two basic causes for this sudden re-eruption. One was economic crisis, the other was a renewed offensive by the regime against the Solidarity. The Polish economy was heading towards a serious crisis. In the first half of 1981 meat supplies had fallen by 17 percent. The shelves in the shops were empty and queuing for hours had become the norm. The shortages were endemic and inflation was rampant. Immediately after the July party congress, the regime opened an offensive against the Solidarity. It announced large increase in food prices. The Solidarity rejected the price rise, but agreed for talks with the government.58

The mood amongst workers was becoming desperate. On 24 July 1981, hundreds of people marched through the streets of Kunto carrying empty pots and pans, with banners declaring 'we are hungry'. The regime responded with a strong media attack on the Solidarity and with a further step towards militarisation.59 Mieczyslaw Rakowski, Deputy Premier, who later assumed leadership of both the government and the Party, led an assault on the Union leaders. He demanded that the Solidarity give up political activity and stop propagating that the government was hampering economic reform. The Solidarity negotiators replied that they would

---

57 Ash, n.15, p.239.
58 ibid, pp.240-1.
59 ibid, p.241.
support an economic austerity package, but would require in exchange, serious step
towards institutional reform and democratisation. Acceptance of the union’s
proposals would have required the ruling class to give up a good measure of its
power, jobs, status and privileges. In reality, the solidarity’s proposals were a frontal
challenge to the apparatus which had closed its ranks against reform. When the
Solidarity leaders suggested that the union must be involved in the supervision of food
production and distribution, Rakowski blamed union for the breakdown of
negotiations. The solidarity National Commission recognised that any hopes of agreed
reform were now finished. 60

On 7 August 1981, a million workers joined a stoppage in Silesian mining area
in protest against the food shortages. On 19-20 August, there was a national
newspaper and printing strike, called by the National Commission to protest at the
union’s exclusion from media. Social tensions of all kinds were rising. The
perspective of self-limitation in the Solidarity farred increasingly against the reality of
the situation. 61 Its leaders, indeed, had lost their sense of direction and were
uncertain about how to proceed. The union’s response was two sided. On the one
hand, the demand for political and institutional changes in Poland gained momentum
while, on the other, the National Commission called for a two-month period without
strikes or marches, and suspended a proposed demonstration on the issue of political
prisoners.

60 ibid, p.265.

The first National Congress of Solidarity held in September 1981 Gdansk was an extraordinary affair in itself. The Congress met in two separate stages. The first was concerned with establishing the union's rules and the second with determining its programme. There was an interval of several days between the first and second parts of the congress. During this interval, the Solidarity presidium came to deal with the government on the question of self-management. The latter part of the congress was taken up with a discussion on the Solidarity programme. What was finally adopted was a complex and in many respects inspired and even noble document.\textsuperscript{62}

The programme gives clear evidence of the degree to which the Solidarity had become radicalised since August 1980. At the heart of the programme was the demand for 'people's power', a principle which declared, 'we do not have the right to abandon' and for the principle to be realised, what is needed is a true socialisation of our government and State administration.\textsuperscript{63} From now on, the Solidarity declared itself not just a trade union, but a social movement aiming at the broad reconstruction of the Polish society. As it had moved from trade unionism to self management, the Solidarity's demands now had broadened to ensure the self-management of the Polish Republic.

The programme would be realised only if the new organisation pushed the State aside, creating space for itself to develop its power and capacities. But, it was here that the programme failed. It proposed revolutionary aims but evaded the question of the means to achieve them. In broad terms, the programme spoke of parliamentary

\textsuperscript{62} Touraine, et al, n.46, p.135.

\textsuperscript{63} ibid, p.141.
reform. Thus, the programme unambiguously announced the Solidarity’s emergence as a self-acknowledged political actor on the Polish stage.⁶⁴

Edward Gierek had to step down from the leadership on 6 September 1980 because of his erroneous policies and grim economic situation of the country. Gierek was succeeded by Stanislaw Kania, as First Secretary of the Party, with the Polish condition more or less remaining the same as earlier. Kania also had to face organised working class movement under the leadership of solidarity which organised mass strikes throughout Poland as a result of which there was a total chaos. Kania too, like Gierek, could not contain the rising momentum of Solidarity and had to step down under pressure.⁶⁵ If the regime was to beat the Solidarity, it must adopt other methods than persuasion. At the meeting of the Party Central Committee on 10 October 1980, Kania was removed as First Secretary, a post which was bequeathed to General Jaruzelski who had now amassed a formidable power base as minister of defence and prime minister. As the First Secretary of the Central Committee Jaruzelski’s accession signified that a serious preparation was under way to establish the option of an internal crackdown against the Solidarity.⁶⁶

On 28 October 1981 the government presented the Sejm with a draft giving itself power to impose martial law. The draft included a ban on all strikes and public

---


65 Crampton, n.24, p.369.

66 ibid, p.374.
meetings, army control of work place, and severe restriction on internal mobility within Poland.  

Faced with a regime that was ever more obviously preparing for a major showdown, the Solidarity’s response was divided and uncertain. After its Congress in 1981, the union had at least on paper more centralised leadership, but in practice, the leadership was more divided than it had ever been. The strikes were continuing, although quite unevenly. On 28 October 1981 national warning strike went ahead, but the atmosphere among the strikers did not indicate greater unity. On the other hand, the national strike call was not enthusiastically received. Some said the Solidarity’s popularity was declining and the union had not been able to ensure any improvement of the living conditions. Walesa replied that local strikes could destroy the union. He ended dramatically by announcing that he was off to Warsaw to Jaruzelski for talks. The talks never came to anything, nor probably did Jaruzelski ever intend they should. He offered the Solidarity a front of national reconciliation, in which the union would be one of seven partners along with the PUWP and five puppet organisations.

Inevitably, the union turned this down. Elections for local councils were due in February 1982. The Solidarity called for free choice of candidates, and for a referendum on whether the Polish people wanted democratic elections. A second manifestation of the political turn in the Solidarity was the increasing attention paid,

68 ibid, p.116.
by majority of activists, to the ideas of nationalist groupings. Third and potentially most significant sign of politicisation among the solidarity activists occurred in relation to self-management.70

In the meanwhile the day-to-day pressure of the worsening economic situation was telling on them. By now, it was impossible to obtain every day necessities such as soap, shampoo, razor blade and coffee without a ration card. The autumn saw the first signs of public tension between workers and peasants. Workers accused the farmers of not selling enough food, the peasants were angry at the shortages of consumer goods, and blamed these on workers' strikes. Every day tensions were running high.

By late November 1981 it was becoming obvious that major confrontation was inevitable. The government announced that it would implement price increase for 1981 while shelving its economic reform package. On 27 November 1982 at Gdansk shipyard meeting attend by representatives from other Shipyards, a militant resolution was carried which declared that since the government's decision offered no way of solving the crisis, there should be an urgent referendum on a vote of no confidence in the government. The preparations for active strikes were begun by regional leadership in Warsaw and Stalowawola as well as Lodz. In Lublin and upper Sileria, regional leaders were calling for definite active strike plans. The Solidarity strategy was to act on its own and draw other regions into action behind them. This form of

70 ibid, p.130.
action, its leaders hoped, and intended, would draw millions of Polish workers into activity once more.\textsuperscript{71}

The National Commission meeting in Gdansk, on December 1981, decided to go ahead with Radom resolutions, should the Sejm adopt the emergency legislation. And if no agreement had been reached with the regime, the Solidarity should hold a referendum on vote of confidence of the Jaruzelski government. On that night, the military struck all over Poland and the leading Solidarity activists were dragged from their homes in a carefully prepared coup.\textsuperscript{72}

General Jaruzelski used section 2 of article 33 of the Polish Constitution, which allowed the Council of State to impose martial law. Eventually, the martial law was officially imposed on 31 December 1981, by which, all civilian authorities were now subordinated to the military for National Salvation. All trade union and political activities were suspended.\textsuperscript{73}

The response of the Solidarity to the unexpected coup was patchy. Three inter-
Factory strike committees were created in Gdansk and in Gorzow. The forms of protest action varied. On the streets of Gdansk there were violent battles between workers and the security forces with reports of death. There were also street demonstration in Warsaw and Lodz, both being brutally repressed.\textsuperscript{74} There were more dramatic strikes that lasted for several days, the most serious struggles occurred


\textsuperscript{72} Sanford, n.67, p.180.

\textsuperscript{73} ibid, p.187.

\textsuperscript{74} ibid, p.189.
in coal mining industry, at Wijek where at least nine workers were killed. The sudden complete blackout in communications, the fierce sanction announced for organising or even participating in a strike, and the mass arrests of the Solidarity leaders made them exceptionally difficult in organising a protest.\textsuperscript{75}

On 29 December 1981, 16 days after the coup, the military regime announced its first formal banning, rather than suspension of a form of popular organisation. The banning symbolised what was at issue in the conflict between the ruling class and the working people of Poland. Within four weeks of the coup, the Solidarity had began to organise itself underground. Leaflets and news bulletins began to appear and circles of resistance emerged. Although, the scale of the underground activity was extensive, numbering ten and perhaps even thousands of participants and supporters with various degrees of involvement, the mass movement had been, for the time being killed.\textsuperscript{76}

The Polish working class had suffered a major defeat, the military crackdown on Solidarity was a major disaster for them. The martial law stood in the way of the Solidarity in achieving its set goal, that is, to bring about transformation in the system itself. Nonetheless, the Solidarity was defeated.\textsuperscript{77}

In January 1982 a special meeting of the Sejm confirmed the legality of martial rule and on 8 October the assembly formally dissolved Solidarity. The government attempted after December 1981 to improve the food shortages by introducing

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{75} Crampton, n.24, p.375.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} ibid, p.376.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} ibid; p.376.
\end{itemize}
rationing system. But the imposition of sanctions and denial of credits by the United States made the process of rationing more difficult.

The reason for the Solidarity's defeat was not that it went 'too far' but exactly the opposite: it did not go far enough. Every time it limited the degree of its challenge to the Polish rulers, it strengthened its enemy and weakened itself. The greatest defect of the Solidarity was that a coherent socialist current, capable of effectively uniting theory and practice, did not emerge inside its organisation.

In Poland General Jaruzelski began to relax military rule by releasing Walesa from detention and suspending martial law in December 1982. However, there was no permanent peace between the government and its opponents. In October 1984 most Poles revolted due to the kidnapping and subsequent murder of father Jerzy Popieluszko, a priest whose anti-government sermons had earned him a large following in his Warsaw suburban Parish. In January 1985 the government eventually modified the proposed price increases after opposition from newly resurgent, although still illegal, Solidarity. In October Solidarity called for boycott of the parliamentary elections. The boycott call was less effective than its organisers had hoped but it nevertheless did much to frustrate the government's attempt to recoup some legitimacy by allowing more than one candidate to stand for each seat. In February 1986 Walesa was arrested and put on trial for allegedly disputing the results of these elections, but the charges were subsequently dropped.

At the end of January 1988 Solidarity called for protests against further price rises, and by the spring of that year the illegal union had unleashed industrial guerrilla warfare with a rash of strikes across the country. In August, following stoppages by
the coal miners, the government offered negotiations with the various groups. Soon after government resigned, following a vote of no confidence in the Sejm, and was replaced by a more reformist Cabinet under Mieczyslaw Rakowski. Sweeping changes in the party leadership came at the end of the year with no less than six members of the politburo deciding to step down.

When Rakowski became the first secretary of the PUWP the units of Warsaw quipped, with more prescience than they could possibly have imagined, that he would have done better to have collect himself the last Secretary.

SOVIET RESPONSE

Poland had since 1945 been the most important member of the Soviet bloc next only to the USSR. As far as economic and military strength was concerned, Poland had been the largest contributor among the East European countries both to the Warsaw pact and to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. For these reasons alone, Poland had long been perceived as the geopolitical linchpin of Moscow's hegemonic system in East Europe. The basic stakes of the USSR in Poland, whether strategic, political or economic did not differ greatly from its interests in the rest of the region. On balance, Moscow appears to have always attached greater significance to its strategic interests in East Europe. Poland lay outside the lines of transportation and communication but linked the Soviet homeland with the group of Soviet forces stationed in former East Germany and this added vital dimension to Moscow's relationship with Warsaw.78

Moscow's main political-ideological objective in Poland, as elsewhere in East Europe, had been to safeguard the existing communist political systems in the region. Since 1956, recurrent crises had forced successive Soviet leadership to trim their expectation to Polish realities. The most recent crisis, culminating in the imposition of martial law in December 1981, underscores once again Poland's vital importance to the Soviet Union. The behaviour of the USSR during the 1980-84 Polish crisis period appeared to have pursued an inconsistent policy, on some occasions expressing confidence that the Polish United Workers Party could overcome Poland's domestic problems and at other times sending warning signals that the socialist countries might offer 'fraternal assistance' to the Poles in order to meet the challenge of anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary groups allegedly operating in that country.

Decisions of singular importance in the Soviet government, since the death of Stalin had been normally adopted after a general consensus had been reached in their favour. Achieving such a consensus involved a complex process of coalition-building among whose members attempts were made to persuade the uncommitted.79 In the past, the coalition of groups favouring or opposing the use of force had been active in Soviet decisions involving military action against another country. During the 1980-84 Polish crisis, while some Soviet leaders opposed using military forces in Poland, few of them actually approved of developments in that country. Other things being equal, a majority in the leadership would not have hesitated to use force to curb what they interpreted as the growing anarchy in Poland. As a result, each Soviet leader had to weigh the costs and benefits to his country of a military intervention. The pro-

military interventionist coalition favoured a Warsaw Pact invasion of Poland. Members of the anti-militancy interventionist coalition believed that the costs of an invasion of Poland outweighed its possible benefits. They supported all measures short of direct military intervention to end the crisis. By April 1981, as the Soviet Union found that the Polish government was unable to arrest the deteriorating domestic situation, the Soviet military became alarmed.

From the perspective of the Soviet leadership, the continuing political unrest in Polish society since 31 August 1980 was posing threats to socialist stability not only in Poland, but also in other countries of East Europe and even in Soviet Union itself. It also observed a failure on the part of the Polish Communist Party to restore domestic political discipline and assure Poland's loyalty to the Warsaw Pact. In Soviet calculation, the major threat to Polish socialism in the fall of the 1980 was coming from the political opposition of workers, intellectuals, and the Catholic church. The Soviets did not fail to understand that these groups wanted major changes in the Soviet style socialist system of Poland.

The creation of Solidarity by workers in August and its insistence on independence from the communist party control were the most serious challenges to Polish socialism arising out of the August strikes and the Gdansk agreement.

82 ibid, p.20.
The political character of the Solidarity, in the Soviet perception, further unfolded itself by its pressure on Warsaw regime through the use of strike threats, many of which were carried out to implement the concessions promised in the Gdansk agreement, such as release of political prisoners, wage increases, meaningful participation of workers in factory administration, and the legalisation of the Union’s charter. This new industrial unrest was seen by the Soviets as a dangerous expression of Polish nationalism and of Poland’s traditional antipathy toward the Soviet Union.84

The solidarity, however, was not the only group which Soviets viewed with alarm during the months after the Gdansk agreement. According to the official media in both Poland and the Soviet Union, there was a sizeable number of dissident intellectuals who were demanding radical changes in Polish socialism. Besides, the Soviets had reasons to worry about the role of the church in the Polish political upheaval. In the confrontation between workers and the state, the church had taken advantage of new opportunities to increase its influence in Polish public affairs.85 In August, the Church had praised striking workers, called for religious freedom and insisted on the right of the people to know about their political and cultural past.

In the context of these worries about the development of organised opposition to Warsaw regime and the spectre of western interference, Soviets viewed with anxiety, the Polish Communist Party’s responses to the continuing social unrest in

Poland. In early September, the Polish United Worker’s Party (PUWP) Central Committee voted to replace Gierek as First Secretary because they considered his policies, at least partly, responsible for the outbreak of labour unrest in the country. No doubt, this change of Polish leadership made the Soviets uneasy. Kania, seemed sympathetic to the striking workers. In his speech he said that the party had made mistakes and that the strikes of July and August had been a legitimate expression of worker’s discontent. The new Polish leader also suggested a possible reorientation of Polish foreign policy when he said that Poland should expand ties with the West. 86

Perhaps the Soviets might not have been so alarmed had it not been for the fear of Polish unrest spilling over to East Germany, Czechoslovakia and even the Soviet Union. An outbreak of Polish type ferment in the socialist bloc countries would jeopardise not only their internal stability but also their loyalty to Moscow. Indeed, the contagion of Polish upsurge already threatening to afflict East Germany and Czechoslovakia, could also spark discontent in still other parts of East Europe, not even excluding the Soviet Union itself. Although conditions in East Germany were not as bad as those in Poland, factory workers in the city of Mugdesburg struck work in late October 1980 and presented the authorities with a list of demands similar to those advanced by their Polish counter parts. Quite naturally, East Germany’s leaders had reasons to become alarmed. They were quick to impose tight restrictions on trips between Poland and East Germany, ending eight years of visa-free travel between the two countries. This move seemed to be inspired by a desire to seal off East German

population from contacts with Poland that conceivably could have contributed to discontent and a Polish-type mass upsurge in the country.  

The East German government showed its concern over events in Poland. Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the East German Socialist Unity Party, said that his country was ready to send whatever fraternal assistance Poland needed to prevent domestic anti-socialist and foreign reactionaries from seizing control of the country. Similar to those of the East German government, Czechoslovakia's leaders were also disturbed by the unrest in Poland. The Czechoslovak leadership condemned in a highly polemical rhetoric the breakdown of order in Poland. It observed that Poland was beginning to experience the worst of all possible developments - the counter-revolution. The Czechoslovak leadership further declared that the defense of the socialist system was a cause of every socialist state and, at the same time, also the common cause of the states of the socialist community which was fully resolved to safeguard its interests and the socialist gains of its peoples. In contrast to the governments of East Germany and Czechoslovakia, the Hungarians and Bulgarians decided to express their solidarity with the pro-interventionist coalition only at the later stages of the crisis. Hungary's leaders had also become increasingly worried by the developments in Poland. The Government of Hungary issued warning to Polish authorities to resolve its internal problems. The Hungarian communists expressed


their hope that Poland's communists would take decisive steps to bar the way to counter-revolution.

The Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania with their physical proximity and cultural affinity to Poland, with their own nationalist-inspired grievances were continuing to express their anger against the Soviet regime in Moscow. The Baltic people showed much interest in the developments in Poland. An underground Lithuanian publication commented that "the right won by Poles to maintain free labour union had breached the system of totalitarian dictatorship and might have serious consequences not only for Poland but also for other socialist countries." The Soviets were surely alarmed by these hints of contagion in Baltic republics. In August 1981, they moved quickly to seal off the entire Baltic region from Western sources of information. In September-October, 1981 the Soviet authorities carried out a rash arrest of Baltic dissidents. For the Soviet Union, the Polish crisis added up to a threat to Soviet and East bloc security, a threat which had particular strategic consequences for the defense of socialist Europe against an attack by NATO. This was precisely the reason why the Soviet Union was eager to see an end to the crisis in Poland and to ensure Poland's loyalty to the Warsaw Pact.

Although the Soviets perceived the Polish crisis as a threat to their security and the threat of force was always present in their dealings with the Polish leadership,


90 ibid, pp.25, 28-29.

they found it expedient to prefer a conciliatory approach which would preserve the myth of an autonomous Poland. They wanted the Polish leadership to cope with the crisis on its own. Such an approach, of course, would also be much less burdensome and risky than an alternative of force and coercion. Further, the Soviets wanted to avoid a disruption of East-West relations, in particular a western propaganda attack on them. But at the same time, the Soviets wanted to give the impression that they were ready to use their power to restore political discipline in the country should events go beyond the control of the P.U.W.P.\(^2\) One could see this methodology of conciliation and implied threat in Soviet actions when Kania was prompted to the post of the First Secretary of the Party. Brezhnev congratulated Kania and expressed confidence in his ability to deal with the crisis that had caused the resignation of his predecessor. The Soviets also offered financial help to the Warsaw government, which was needed to meet interest payments on a staggering debt to Western banks and to expand stagnant industrial output. Further, in a conciliatory approach, the Soviet leadership again demonstrated its support to Kania in a bilateral summit in Moscow at the end of October. The Soviets also took the opportunity of the October Summit to underline their concern over the dangers of the continuing disorder in Poland and their wish to have Warsaw authorities move decisively against elements challenging their power. A joint communique issued at the end of the summit referred to the indissoluble fraternal ties between the two peoples.\(^3\)

\(^2\) Ibid, p.341.

In the late 1980, the question of intervention had become a primary one. The increasing Soviet toughness in November coincided with an apparent growth of sentiment among political and military leaders in Soviet Union, East Germany and Czechoslovakia in favour of a military intervention in Poland. The Soviet ground commanders in Central European diplomacy seemed, thus far, to have failed to include Kania to act decisively against political opposition in his country. Moreover, at this time there was some actual preparation for a military action against Poland. The Soviet government called up reservists, brought war reserve equipment to readiness for use, and held military manoeuvres on the Soviet-Polish frontiers.

Along with this interventionist sentiment there continued to be those who favoured diplomacy in dealing with the Polish situation. In most of what he said and did about Poland throughout the late 1980, the Soviet leader Brezhnev preferred diplomacy. For example, he frequently had reiterated his confidence in the ability of the Polish leadership to restore order in Poland without help. Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders who favoured diplomacy in dealing with the Poles, notably Foreign Minister Gromyko and Defense Minister Ustinov, may have been worried about military success.

The inevitable opposition of the Polish Catholic Church, and indeed Vatican itself, to a Warsaw Pact intervention in Poland was one of the reasons for the Soviet caution about intervention. A military intervention also would have imposed an

94 ibid, pp.24-27.
95 ibid, p.30.
96 Ascherson, n.83, p.227.
economic burden on the Soviets. They would have to provide an occupied Poland with massive economic aid. This economic burden might have been intolerable because the Soviets would have had to give an aid in an area where they had problems of their own, namely, agricultural. And matters would have become worse for the Soviets if the Western countries, especially the United States, were to retaliate against the Soviet Union by an extension of the restrictions of trade imposed by the Carter administration after the intervention in Afghanistan. Diplomatic and strategic consideration also contributed to the Soviets caution in Poland, in particular the likelihood of a confrontation with the United States. American leaders of both parties had warned the Soviets against military intervention in Poland. The Soviet leaders also had to reckon with the possibility that military invasion of Poland might accelerate the Carter administration’s strengthening of American ties with China. Perhaps still greater reason for the Soviet restraint in Poland was a risk of damage to detente with Western Europe.

As the Soviet leadership grappled with the question of large scale military intervention in Poland, a number of communist parties in Europe, notably those of Romania, Yugoslavia and Italy, had expressed opposition to any such move.

In the Warsaw Pact Summit convened in Moscow on 5 December 1980 to discuss the Polish crisis and other East bloc issues, there was some evidence of Soviet antipathy to a military intervention in Poland. Brezhnev had begun in November to transfer the Soviet ground commanders in central Europe, supportive of intervention, to new posts from which they would have difficulty lobbying their

---

97 Anderson, n.93, pp.27-29.
position. A Joint Communique issued at the end of the summit endorsed continuation of a political approach to the Polish crisis. 98

As the new year of 1981 began, the only alternative to military intervention for the Soviet leadership was the continuation of political diplomacy towards Warsaw. Brezhnev and those within the Soviet leadership who supported his non-interventionist approach continued to hope - though with lesser confidence and, perhaps, more anxiety than in September - that this diplomacy would suffice to get Kania to adopt the toughness Moscow considered necessary to restore order in Poland and thereby assure both its conformity to orthodox Soviet style socialism and its continuing loyalty to the Warsaw Pact. Despite threats to stability which the events of the late 1980 brought to socialism, the odds against intervention were formidable.

As a result of Soviet pressure Stainslaw Kania had to vacate the General Secretaryship in the Party in favour of Gen. Jaruzelski, who was till then the Premier as well as the Minister of Defence. On that fateful date of December 13, Gen. Jaruzelsi established a new ruling body called the Council of National Salvation with himself as head of it, assuming full dictatorial powers. The act imposing martial law was itself unconstitutional from both substantive and procedural points of view. The Soviet government had greeted the act of Martial Law as an embodiment of the highest statesmanship and a testimony to the Socialist harmony of Warsaw government. 99

98 ibid, pp.24-26.

The behaviour of the Jaruzelski government in the last 10 months had been at the root of the fears about the future of Solidarity. These fears became a reality when on 8 October 1982, the Sejm adopted a piece of legislation due to pressure from Moscow, in which solidarity had been outlawed and branded as counter-revolutionary plotting a civil war. The civil rights of all people were suspended. There was an introduction of summary trials in the courts, higher institution of learning were closed down and a ban on foreign travels was imposed.

However, despite mass arrests, countless shortages and manifold ways of terror and intimidation, the spirit of Solidarity did not fade away. This was testified to by the number of demonstrations which took place in many cities of Poland, even after the solidarity was banned.

Politically, the necessity of martial law reflected the total bankruptcy of the system. By mid-1983, it was clear that all attempts to regain a degree of legitimacy among the general population had failed. Moreover, the party’s efforts to reassert its authority or even to put its internal house in order had been wholly ineffective.

Although official explanations for martial law stressed the need to half the tailspin of the Polish economy, the year 1982 witnessed a continuing slide in overall economic activity, down 8 percent from 1981 after a drop of 13 percent in the

101 Cieplak, n.99, p.67.
102 Korbonski, n.100, p.67.
previous year. Preliminary estimates for 1983 had projected a slight rise over 1982, but at best that would bring the economy back only to 1974 level. The failure of the Polish economy to recover more quickly had cost Moscow dearly. In addition, depressed production in Poland continued to have an adverse impact on economic performance throughout the region.

In late summer of 1982, there were indications that Moscow was becoming impatient with the slow pace of normalization in Poland. The Soviet Union had hoped that the martial law regime would control worst economic situation and underground activities of the solidarity, but martial law regime showed its unwillingness to apply strong measures to restore order in Poland. Although martial regime failed on all front, Soviet Union maintained the same conciliatory approach.

There is no evidence that Brezhnev’s death and his replacement by the new leadership had any immediate effect on Moscow’s policy towards Poland. Thus, the whole Soviet Policy towards Poland from 1981 to 1984 appears to have remained unchanged.

Conclusion

Despite threats to stability which the events of the fall of 1980 brought to Polish socialism, the odds against intervention were formidable. The Soviets were not prepared in 1980 for a military action on the scale of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979. At the very least Soviets risked a Polish national resistance that could have escalated into an unwanted confrontation with the West and heightened difficulties with China. A Soviet intervention in Poland also risked increasing divisions

and disagreements within the European Communist Party movement at the expense of Soviet political and military influence, especially in the East bloc.

As the new year of 1981 began, the only alternative to military intervention for the Soviet leadership was the continuation for the Soviet leadership was the continuation of political diplomacy toward Warsaw. Brezhnev and those within the Soviet leadership supported his non-interventionist approach towards Polish crisis. And to a great degree this decision not to intervene was a successful one. If the Polish political situation again should take a turn for the worse from Moscow's vantage point, and if the Kremlin, after weighing costs and benefits of a military intervention as it did at the end of 1980, against opts to proceed with caution and restraints, a realistic western diplomacy that takes into account the limits of Soviet behaviour toward Poland could give the Poles an opportunity to try again to go their own way in Eastern Europe.