CHAPTER II
SOVIET POLICY TOWARDS CRISIS IN EAST EUROPE:
A GENERAL SURVEY

This crises in East Europe in 1950s, 1960s and 1980s were the most articulate examples of both the non-viability and non-acceptability of the Soviet model of socialism in that region. Although it did not yet call for the abandonment of socialism, the reformers did have an elaborate plan for making far reaching modification of the Soviet model of socialism. It was obvious that any such move would oversensitise the Soviet leadership. Any East European crisis situation and active Soviet response to it, therefore, were intrinsically related.

Events leading to crisis situation in East Europe were the products of a myriad of factors. All of these invariably resulted from their disapproval of the modus operandi of system, its negative social, political and economic consequences as well as a self-confident societal demand for suitable change to make the system fulfil people's aspirations. No doubt, such an approach of the citizenry amounted to the transformation of the system in whose establishment and continuation Soviet Union had played such a great role.

The present chapter tries to analyse the process of Communist takeovers and its adverse impact on the East European societies, the subsequent imposition of the Soviet economic and political model on the region and finally the conduct of Soviet policy towards crisis in East Europe over a period of time.
THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVERS: EAST EUROPE AT THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The communist domination of East Europe was not accomplished overnight. The commissars did not simply move in as soon as the Gauleiters had packed their bags and left; the takeovers were complex processes, varying in form and timing from country to country. In a classic examination of these processes Hugh Seton Watson discerned three stages: a general coalition of left-wing, anti-fascist forces; a bogus coalition in which the communists neutralised those in other parties who were not willing to accept communist supremacy; and finally, complete communist domination, frequently exercised in a new party formed by the fusion of communist and other leftist groups. During the first and second stages the communists established enormous influence through social organisations under their control, such as trade unions, women and youth associations and Soviet friendship societies, all of which were usually grouped in a national or popular front which was directed by the communists.\(^1\)

Historians will no doubt debate for generations whether there was a cold war because of the communist takeovers or whether there were communist takeovers because of the cold war; what they will not dispute, however, is that the takeovers and the cold war were inextricably interwoven. East Europe had been acknowledged as the Red Army’s responsibility in Tehran talks of December 1943, and this became clear to the world in June 1944 when the Allied forces landed in Normandy rather than in the Balkans. In October 1944 in the infamous ‘percentage agreements’, Churchill in seemingly cavalier fashion, handed Rumania and Bulgaria to Soviet

domination.² At Tehran the West had agreed that the Soviet Union should take Poland east of the Curzon line because Stalin claimed that this was necessary for the defence of the USSR.

Until 1947, there was some uncertainty in Moscow and East European capitals concerning the attitude of the major western powers towards the Communist takeovers. It was only in 1947 that the Western Allies (United States of America, Great Britain and France) formalised their acquiescence in the Soviet takeover of East Europe by signing peace treaties and diplomatic recognition instruments with several communist-dominated regimes.³

In the immediate post-war months Stalin's priority had been to establish a secure western border for the Soviet Union. A dependable government in Poland was essential for this, not least to ensure unhindered access to the Soviet garrisons in eastern Germany which were the front line of Soviet defences against any further incursion from the West. Whether Stalin intended to establish fully communist governments elsewhere in eastern Europe is not clear. What he would have liked was not necessarily what he was scheming to bring about. With the exception of Poland, it is probable that Stalin ties came his way; as a recent study has noted, Stalinisation was a process, not a plan.⁴

There was no doubt that Red army greatly helped in creating favourable opportunities: Stalin had once told the Yugoslav communist, Milovan Djilas, that "This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory imposes his own social system as far as his army can reach". The Soviet forces provided massive material and psychological support to local communists. Without the presence of the Red Army it would be difficult to explain why the tiny communist parties of Rumania and Hungary succeeded whilst the large ones in France and Italy failed. The Red Army, more especially in the earliest days, could favour local communists by supplying them with vehicles, petrol, paper, typewriters, and other scarce items necessary for the carrying out of political activities. Yet occupation by the Red Army did not always bring communist rule. It was noted that there was no significant Red Army presence in Albania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria or Czechoslovakia when communist power was established in those countries.

The communist takeovers depended upon a number of factors, internal as well as external. In the first place socialism seemed in 1945 to be the 'future'. The successful consumer capitalism which began to emerge in the 1950s was as yet largely undreamed of, the general image of capitalism being the system which had failed in 1929 and the 1930s, the system from whose debilitation had emerged militant fascism, war, and the horrors of Auschwitz. The Soviet economy, on the other hand, had been spared the rigours of the depression; that it had inflicted the horrors of collectivisation, famine and terror. Further, the massive destruction brought about by the war demanded coordinated efforts at renewal; many believed that this

was a task so vast that it could not be accomplished without the aid of the state and perhaps only under its direction.⁶ The communist were regarded by many as proven practitioners of such planned restructuring.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The communist takeovers, or to use their terminology, the socialist revolutions, had brought the working class to power. However, that class was seldom in the majority and so, according to Marxist laws, it had to establish the means for consolidating and perpetuating its authority: the socialist state. During the first stage of post-revolutionary development, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat, the class struggle would intensify as the last vestiges of bourgeois rule were to be eliminated. In this process the working class would be guided and led by its vanguard: the communist party.⁷ This was, of course, the pattern set in the Soviet Union, but Eastern Europe differed somewhat from the Soviet Union where it had been a civil war which had finally placed the working class or rather its vanguard in power. This slight embarrassment was rapidly overcome by its being decided that the Red Army’s presence in Eastern Europe secured a relatively peaceful transition from capitalist to socialist rule and therefore obviated the need for a civil war. What emerged in East Europe, therefore, was what Laszlo Ralsk referred to as a ‘dictatorship of the proletariat without the Soviet form’. At this stage the state was usually called a ‘people’s democracy’.

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⁶ Crampton, n.2, p.213.
As the dictatorship of the proletariat progressed, the non-proletarian social groups would be removed and a unified society would appear. From the dictatorship of the proletariat would emerge the socialist state of the whole notion under the leadership of the working class, a change which signified by a change of name, the state usually becoming a ‘socialist or people’s republic’. The next stage would be to develop an advanced or mature, socialist society in which state and non-state forms of social organisation would combine in what would be the first step in the creation of that communist society to which all human society was inevitably moving. In theory this was perfectly logical, since it was a basic Marxist tenet that the state is the mechanism which one class uses to exercise domination over another; if society has become unified, i.e., classless, there can be no domination of one class over another and therefore there is no need for a state; it can, in the classic Marxist phrase, ‘wither away’. This was the message which the compulsory and hugely unpopular instruction in Marxism-Leninism drummed into all pupils. There were indications that some leaders also took it seriously; Khrushchev’s programme for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1961 certainly spoke confidently of the first stages of communism being reached by 1980s, whilst the Yugoslav party theorist, Edvard Kardelj, saw his country’s self-management system as a means by which communism could be built.

There were few theoretical provisions for the withering away of the party, rather the contrary in Romania where it was said the state would blend with the Party, which might be construed as an admission that the problem of the state’s withering

away would simply be swept under the all-covering aspect of party power. The Bulgarian party made it clear that it did not see historical evolution as leading to the disappearance of the party. As Todor Zhivkov said:

The gradual transition of our state into a state of the entire nation and the extension of socialist democracy are unthinkable without the further consolidation of the hegemonic role of the working class, and without enhancing the leading role of the Communist Party in the entire system of public life.\(^9\)

By this logic, as the state changed from the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ to the state of the ‘whole people’, so the party would evolve from the party of the working class into a party of the whole nation. In this process, it was presumed, ethnic differences would also become less and less important as the State restructured on the basis of one, homogeneous social group; ethnic nationalities would merge into the unified ‘socialist nation’.

The logic of Soviet control over the post-World War II East European regimes had its own historical antecedents. After the Bolshevik revolution in Russia communist parties were quickly formed in almost all East European countries. In order to join the Communist International (Comintern) headed by the Soviet Union national communist party had to accept the Comintern conditions of membership. These conditions required the strict subordination of party members to the party leadership. During 1920s the East European communist parties accepted an additional but unwritten condition for membership in the comintern: the subordination of national party as a

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whole to the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. From Stalin's perspective, control over the East European parties may have been one of the prerequisites for maintaining control over East European Society and political system. At the end of the Second World War Soviet armies installed communist parties in power in most of the East European countries. The only exceptions were Yugoslavia and Albania where communist parties had come to power by organising strong indigenous movements of national resistance against the occupation of their countries by German and Italian armies.

THE IMPOSITION OF SOVIET COMMUNIST PATTERN ON EAST EUROPE

The second world war was quickly followed by cold war with the American-Soviet confrontation over the ideology and political developments in East Europe which led Stalin to rigorously impose Communist hegemony in the entire region. The scope of Moscow's control was not confined only to the presence of the Soviet troops in these countries, nor even in the foisting of the communist party domination on them. The entire state structure in East Europe was basically designed on the Soviet model and the theoretical formulations justifying such take overs was provided by the concept of people's democracy. In spite of the fact that there were certain local variations and some ostensible differences of pattern from that of the Soviet Union, in practice they had the character of one party dictatorship which led to the


liquidation of the essentials of democracy.\textsuperscript{12} In reality, the regimes were propped largely by the presence of the Soviet troops.

The Soviet leadership under Stalin sought to establish and maintain its absolute and arbitrary domination over the East European satellite leadership, regardless of how faithfully they might have been emulating the Soviet model of ‘communist dictatorship’ on their own accord.\textsuperscript{13} The element of Stalin’s programme was the establishment of centralised ideological dominance of the CPSU over other communist parties in Eastern Europe. This objective was accomplished through the creation of cominform in September 1947.\textsuperscript{14}

The highly disciplined Moscovite apparatchiks were at the nucleus of political power in the satellite countries. Those communists who might have been inclined to steer their countries through more individualistic paths to communism were obviously at a great disadvantage. There was no room for political opposition in Stalin’s scheme of things. Those who deviated from the Soviet-charted course of communist construction were either purged from the satellite leaderships imprisoned and even executed.\textsuperscript{15}

In Stalin’s scheme there was only one way to communism - the way of the Soviet Union, which he had guided over almost a full generation. Control

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Nikhil Chakravarty, "Unprecedented Upsurge", \textit{World Focus}, vol.11, nos.7-8, July-August 1990, p.3.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Crampton, n.2, pp.240-2.
\item \textsuperscript{15} William R. Kintner and Wolfgang Klaiber, n.3, p.11.
\end{itemize}
consolidation a la Stalin meant the extension of communist political authority over all but the most intimate aspects of human life and the building of a control machine that would assure obedience to this all-pervasive political authority. Basic to this endeavour was the banning of those human rights which were usually held sacred in western societies - freedom of speech, movement and association. Furthermore, all of the means of production and livelihood had to be in the hands of the state.

The Soviet model was imposed in all spheres of life, but more specifically in the field of politics, economy, culture, etc. A brief explanation of some of these aspects of Soviet control may be in order here.

Political Sphere

At the centre of the political system in East Europe since the communist takeovers was the communist party, its leading role was an absolute political rule. Marx and Engels had said little on the precise nature of the party, other than it would be the vanguard of working class. It was Lenin who had translated this algebra into arithmetic, shaping a party which was able to seize power not least because he had persuaded it to accept an extraordinary degree of discipline. Stalin developed it further and fashioned a party which would blindly apply the decisions of its leader.

The communist parties of East Europe were not political parties in the western sense. They were apparatuses for running states and controlling societies, they did not represent sectional interests. On the contrary, they claimed to represent the

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16 Ibid, p.11.
overall interests of society on the basis of which they felt justified in imposing their priorities in every sphere of human life.

The leading role of the Party meant the subjugation of the state and society to it. The executive branch in the Stalin period generally united the top posts in state and party in the same person. After Stalin's death, practice varied but even where the head of state was a different figure from the party chief there was never any pretence that executive authority rested anywhere other than in the party's highest organs. Institutions of state such as the armed forces were all under party control.

The legislature was similarly constrained. Parliaments were still elected but they seldom met more than a few days in a year, and their function was to give legitimacy to policies already decided upon by the politburo or the central committee of the communist party.18

The state economy was entirely controlled by the party. The economic plans were administered, as was the whole of the economy itself, through the vast planning and economic ministries in the capital all of which were in the hands of party members or those upon whom the party could depend.

Within the wider social context all mass organisations were under the control of the party. Many of these such as the Soviet friendship societies, the Komsomols and their juniors, the pioneers or the national fronts were creations of the party itself and those which had predated party rule, such as the trade unions or the universities were restructured to ensure they fell under party domination. In the fields of culture and media the party-approved censors exercised strict control. The party sought

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domination as well as total political control. The political system which had been
developed in East Europe under Stalin rested on fear rather than consensus.\textsuperscript{19}

**Economic Sphere**

Stalin's boundless brutality during the industrialisation and collectivisation drives of the early 1930s had meant the Soviet Union was able to achieve economic growth in a period of savage economic depression in the rest of the world. This had confirmed planning in many people's minds as the infallible means to secure economic health of societies. Thus the East European economies were forced into the Stalinist economic strait-jacket. Within the span of few years after the establishment of Socialist regimes imitation of the Soviet of the Soviet model of economic management began in East European countries. The communist governments established state ownership and control of all the means of non-agricultural production. The process of nationalisation of industry was completed by 1950 in all East European countries. The drive to collectivize agriculture also began at varying speed in different countries.

All economic activities were to be governed by the five-year plans, which were themselves divided into yearly, quarterly and even monthly segments. The primary and frequently the sole object of economic activity was to achieve plan production targets, it did not much matter if there were no obvious market for the goods concerned as long as the plan targets were fulfilled. There was little coordination between separate production units. For example, cars would be produced without any attempt to provide service stations or even build suitable roads, and a brand new hospital would stand empty because the planners had not arranged for the production

\textsuperscript{19} ibid, p.20.
of the equipment to be provided to it. Nevertheless, the political objective of the
economic activities involved had been achieved.\(^{20}\)

The tentacles of Soviet control were obvious throughout East Europe's cultural
life too. For example, from the late 1940s onwards regular ceremonial knowhows had
to be made on the pattern of the supposedly superior Soviet culture. This soon
proved to mean a good deal more than the expression of adherence to scientific
socialism as expounded and practiced by "the glorious party of Lenin and Stalin". It
also meant the duty of paying homage to the culture of the great Russian people.\(^{21}\)
This involved a good deal of rewriting of national history to accord with Russian
national prejudices and a good deal of denial of national cultures.

Thus, in all aspects of life the Soviet communist pattern was ruthlessly imposed
throughout the region of East Europe. Collectivization was introduced even in those
countries which had small peasant economy. Industrial enterprises of considerable
strength under private management were also brought under state ownership as in
Czecho-Slovakia and East Germany. Everywhere, local initiatives were attuned to the
communist party's dictat. Even within the communist parties, all nationalist trends
were suppressed. Not only the Soviet model of functioning but unreserved allegiance
to the Soviet communist party became the order of the day. It was, therefore, no
accident nor was it blatantly prerogative to call the countries of East Europe satellites
of Moscow.


\(^{21}\) Kurt London, n.17, p.71.
The Warsaw Pact and COMECON provided the strategic and economic alibies for Soviet domination. In reality, the Soviet hegemony was much more pronounced than the membership of a military or economic alliance would warrant.\(^{22}\) Thus, all East European countries remained as an integral part of a highly centralised empire directly controlled from Moscow.

This authoritarian monolith could hardly sustain itself on a permanent basis. The first to raise the standard of revolt was Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav communists no longer regarded obedience to the leaders of the Soviet party as their primary duty. They viewed their task as that of constructing a socialist society in Yugoslavia. As members of ruling party leaders of the Yugoslav state were not willing to cede control over matter of personnel and policy to Moscow. The bickering between Stalin and Tito over the role of Soviet advisers in the military, economic, cultural and political hierarchies of the new Yugoslav state revealed that the Leninist principle of state and the Stalinist model of industrial development concentrated political power in an East European state in the hands of the local East European party.\(^{23}\) Yugoslavia also deviated from the Marxist-Leninist principles as defined by the Soviet Union and practised its own road to socialism which was in tune with its own domestic policies and priorities.

As long as Stalin was alive, the East European communist systems had to reckon with his unchallenged authority. His death, on 5 March 1953 was of enormous political significance, because it marked the end of a personal dictatorship

\(^{22}\) Nikhil Chakravarty, n.12, p.3.

and a massive political dislocation in the Soviet Union as well as in all East European parties and states.

Stalin left no clear successor and his death initiated a long struggle for power in the Kremlin in which the first apparent victors were Gheorghii Malenkov and the secret police chief, Lavrenti Beria. They were the proponents of the so called "new course" which offered a more relaxed form of socialism with less emphasis on heavy industry and more on consumer goods, together with a reduction in the role of the police, the substitution of collective rule for the cult of personality and as a consequence of the latter, a separation of state and party, at least at the uppermost level.24

Hints of an improvement in living standard sharpened consciousness of existing hardship whilst the more relaxed political atmosphere removed some of the restraints against expressing dissatisfaction with those hardships. In May 1953 the tobacco workers in Plovdiv, traditionally one of the reliable bastions of support for the Bulgarian communist party, came out on strike against high work norms and low wages. On 31 May the Czechoslovak government announced a currency reform which meant an instant and substantial rise in food prices and an effective 12 percent cut in wages.25 The political temperature rose as rapidly as the cost of living index and there were wide-spread demonstrations and strikes, the most serious being that by 20,000 workers in the Skoda plant at Plzen who attacked portraits of Clement Gottwald and Stalin and the Soviet flag.

Thus, at the regular interval of about twelve years the crisis situation continued to be in one or the other countries of East Europe. This chapter attempts to bring about a general survey of the crisis situation of following countries.

The East German Uprising

The East German regime, far from alleviating the economic plight of the people, decided to raise the work norms, so that the workers had to produce more in order to get the same wages. Many workers were enraged at the regime because, the increase norms meant more work for no increase in the standard of living; they were in effect suggesting a pay cut. Angry building workers on the huge construction sites on the Stalinalle took to the streets, they were joined by others in a March to the trade union headquarters where no one would speak to them. A government spokesman conceded that the increase in norms would be withdrawn but by then the demonstrators’ demands had escalated and become political. They now wanted the resignation of the regime and free elections, threatening a general strike if these were not granted.26

On 17 June 1953 East Germany was in ferment. Strikes were recorded in 317 locations and they involved approximately 400,000 workers. That the increases in work norms should be withdrawn remained on the strikers’ agenda, but the lists of political demands had lengthened since the previous day. Added to the calls for the resignation of the government and for the free elections was one for the disbanding of army; in a parody of Goering’s famous phrase there were slogans reading, "we

don't want a national army, we want butter". There were also a few calls for German reunification but this did not play a prominent part in what remained overwhelmingly a working class and socialist outburst. Bonn was attacked as much as Berlin. When the protesters invaded SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) headquarters in Leipzig they burnt down every portrait they found.

After the death of Stalin the East European leaders were required to espouse the new course. Hungary did so in June 1953, Rumania in August, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia in September and Poland in October. In some cases, however, commitment to the new course was minimal, being little more than the lip-service to the new canons preached in the Kremlin. In this there was more than modicum of wisdom because the power constellation in Moscow was not yet securely established. In June 1953, Beria had been arrested and in January 1955 Malenkov who until then had seemed to be the dominant figure, was pushed aside by the new leader Nikita Khrushchev. In any case the experimentation in relaxation which the 'new course' represented had produced destabilization in East Europe.

The issue which Khrushchev used to defeat Malenkov was that of investment policy. Khrushchev favoured a move closer to the old orthodoxy of concentration on heavy industry. His switch back towards more traditional, Stalinist economics was balanced by a move towards political relaxation. He urged each socialist state and

27 Ibid, p.220.
party to be more independent, and sought to retain the cohesion of the socialist bloc through regulated economic, military and ideological agreements. It was in late 1950s that COMECON began to assume a real role in the economic life of East Europe.

Khrushchev was attempting to grasp the nettle of destalinisation, a necessary process if eastern Europe were to be revivified and the socialist states to make any real economic and political progress.

Khrushchev delivered a secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in February 1956 where he dwelt upon Stalin’s mistakes, which were said to have included the unjust persecution of ‘honest comrades’. There must, said Khrushchev, be an end to cult of personality. His denunciation of Stalin’s crimes at the Twentieth Congress unleashed East European demands and hopes for even greater desatellization and de-Stalinization. Khrushchev’s secret speech began to emerge in East Europe as an alternative approach to ideology and socio-economic arrangements of the Stalinist type. The Yugoslav assertion of the right to pursue a non-Stalinist path of socialism, new course relaxation, the slackening of cold war attitudes as expressed in the tenet of peaceful co-existence, seemingly cathartic and expiratory stand of Khrushchev, were the factors responsible for a shattering situation and triggered into explosions in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Soviet-type communism could never be the same after 1956.30

During the early 1950s in Poland and Hungary and, during early 1960s, in Czechoslovakia the extreme centralization of economy practised by the ruling communist parties led general economic stagnation. The chief defect of the economic

system was its absolute subjection to political priorities. At the level of strategic planning this meant throughout the communist period, but more especially at the beginning, that there was an overemphasis on heavy industry and a neglect of light industry which supplied consumer goods. The heavy industry meant power generation, infrastructural projects in communications, mineral extraction and steel production. The fact that each country set out to copy the Soviet model produced needless duplication and at times grotesque follies. Every country, even Albania, built steel mills, even if they lacked the necessary resources of energy and mineral ores; the Hungarian project at Sztalinvaros (Dunapentele) relied on Hungarian coal and Yugoslavian iron ore, a distinct problem when economic ties with Yugoslavia were frozen after 1948. The massive Bulgarian metallurgical plant at Kremikovtsi constructed in the 1960s, was built despite expert advice that local ores were inadequate for steel production, the result being that ore had to be imported from USSR and carried over two hundred miles from the port at Burgas.

If the strategic decisions were frequently flowed by the need to conform to grand ideological designs, the local application of policy was impaired by the party’s determination to keep all power and responsibility within its control. Factory managers and foremen could hold their posts only if they were cleared under nomenclature system; not infrequently they were not the best people for the job. Even if they were capable managers they were constrained by the political considerations which ran counter to the dictates of good management. As a Yugoslav

31 Michael Gamarnikow, n.20, pp.25-27.
factory director remarked: "politics are so dominant over the economy that the simple economic logic is denied."32

The shortcomings of the system was so obvious, that the reformers in the respective countries called for the decentralization of management and replacement of the party apparatchik by technical specialists.33 To carry out economic decentralization, the reformers in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia wanted to give greater freedom to scientists and intellectuals in the hope of revitalising their societies.

The Polish Crisis

As early as 1950s, the Polish economy had begun to experience serious difficulties. As the economic crisis matured, Poland also experienced the rise of a highly powerful, sophisticated and advanced working class movement. The year 1956 brought crisis phenomena, which had been brewing in the country’s economy, to the forefront of public life and gave them powerful impetus.34 The Polish People’s Republic was in the throes of the most serious crisis which did not just reflect erroneous policies of the leadership, but strike at the roots of the system itself. Poland witnessed workers unrest during 1950s.

Economic hardship was the contributory factor for the crisis. Immediately after the war few had expected to see consumer goods in abundance and austerity was tolerable whilst the country’s basic infrastructure was recreated; for such causes predation was comprehensible and acceptable. Yet in the early 1950s conditions

were becoming worse rather than better. As a result, in 1951, food rationing was introduced, there were price increases in 1953 and by 1955 real earnings were 36 percent below their 1949 levels.

Crisis in Poland in 1950s was more than simply economic. On 28 June 1956 workers of the Stalin engineering group in Poznan came out on the streets to protest at their bad economic situation, they struck work and marched into town with banner demanding 'Bread and Butter, freedom, the release of Cardinal Wyszynski and Russians to go home'; the social, political and national character of the Polish revolt had been explicitly stated at its very outset. In Poland it was the first time that workers had decided to stand up for their rights against the communist regime. Thus, the Poznan event 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 also price increase had been the signal for mass strikes and demonstrations in the costal shipyard cities. There was once again the workers riots in Ursus and Radom in June 1976, in protest against drastic food price increases, which left the regime badly shaken. Crisis in Polish society was largely due to the wrong policies pursued by communist leaders right from Gomulka to Gierek.

In order to cope with deteriorating situation the Polish regime of Edwad Gierek adopted what was called 'New Economic Manoeuvre'. The main objectives of the New Economic Manoeuvre to increase the living standard of the people and reduce


the prices of essential commodities. But the results of the New Economic Manoeuvre were not at all encouraging. The economic conditions continued to worsen. Although the prices of basic foodstuffs were officially not increased, in practice they kept on rising. Prices of various other commodities were increased in the name of improving their quality. Thus many essential commodities still remained beyond the reach of ordinary public. The 'New Economic Manoeuvre' failed to prevent the price rise and also could not save the country from reaching the worst economic situation.37

Another attempt was also made to bring Poland out of deep economic crisis by adopting 'accelerated development strategy'. Through this the Polish regime tried to achieve a higher level of agricultural and industrial output. However, this strategy of attaining higher production in agriculture and industry by using short cut also fell through.38

Thus, in spite of adopting the result oriented policies such as 'New Economic Manoeuvres' and 'Accelerated Development Strategy', the Polish leadership could not succeed in saving the country from falling into grave economic crisis. As the crisis became a regular phenomenon in Poland the unrest and revolt on the part of workers, therefore, was the most natural thing to happen. The outburst of crisis 1980, like many previous upheavals in Communist Poland, was due to price increases of essential items which were instrumental in provoking the workers.

In the wake of the crisis situation, the workers trade union in the name of Solidarity was constituted on 17 September 1980 in the Baltic city of Gdansk. Its political action was an extension of its trade union programme aimed at the democratization of the Polish society.

The situation in Poland in 1980s was different from that of 1956 and 1970. The initiative of the movement this time came from the workers, not from the intellectuals or a section of the political leadership. During the course of the movement the Solidarity waged a long drawn out battle against the communist regime to achieve and bring about radical change in the system itself.

The Hungarian Crisis

The causes which brought about the Hungarian revolution of 1956 were similar to those which produced the crisis in Poland: an affronted nationalism; an economy in which all effort was directed towards infrastructure and heavy industry with little thought for the consumer; a challenging intelligentsia; and a ruling party which was more and more divided and disoriented at all levels.39

The increasing drabness of life and the dearth of consumer goods, including foodstuffs, was the result of the regime's economic policies and attitudes. With more information becoming available after 1953 the extent of the devastation of the economy became ever clearer in public perception. Industrialisation had been launched according to the Soviet pattern and work practices, too followed those pioneered in the USSR. In the field of agriculture an order issued in 1948 provided for the establishment of collective farms in Hungary. The ruthlessly imposed

collectivisation drove many peasants away from the land. Physical torture was used to force peasants to join collectives. For those independent farmers who remained, conditions deteriorated rapidly. After delivery quotas had been met there was little grain left for household use and it had to be purchased on the black market where prices were three to four times higher than the price fixed by the state purchasing agency for compulsory procurement. As the productivity of Hungarian agriculture declined under the assault of socialism the socialist authorities, following Moscow’s orders, insisted that more food be sent abroad to earn hard currency. As a result, there was a permanent shortage of food in Hungary, one of East Europe’s important grain producers at one time. There was a widespread shortage of bread and potatoes, the like of which had not been seen in living memory.

Heavy industry expanded very rapidly indeed, although this led to some monstrous results. The consumers had to pay for it, the most elementary consumer goods being either in short supply or incredibly poor in quality. The over emphasis on heavy industry by the government created crisis for the consumer items which literally hit the consumer in society.

Under such situation, the economic position of the country became rapidly worse and worse. Events in Hungary took an entirely different course. Imre Nagy came to power in June 1953 by replacing Matyas Rakosi. His first speech in parliament created a revolutionary impact. Not that Imre Nagy meant to sow the seeds of national uprising; his aim was to purify the party, which acted as

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40 Ibid, p.289.
authoritarian and to substitute good communism for bad communism. He condemned the previous five year plans and blamed them for the deterioration of the standard of living. Nagy initiated broad reform programme out of conviction: a change of emphasis from heavy industry to production of consumer goods; attempts to reduce the economic strain and privation, and restrict the use of forced labour; agricultural policies with less emphasis on collectivisation; a curtailing of repression and the powers of the secret police; and attempts to foster a free artistic, educational and cultural atmosphere. The Nagy programme, moreover, was evolving into a form of national communism.

Nagy had laid down a concept of alternative economic, political and cultural policies within the parameters set by the communist ideology. Nagy had stimulated an authentic politicisation process which was not in essence a form of anti-communism, but a decision of nature and goals of the communist system and of how to secure a purer or more virtuous form of communism. A growing feeling of nationalism developed focusing on Nagy’s reforms. Eventually on 23 October 1956 national uprising started in Hungary to bring about radical change in both economic and political spheres of life. Revolt in Hungary for internal reforms created great concern among the other Warsaw pact communist regimes in general and Soviet Union in particular.


44 Ibid, p.90.
The Czechoslovak Crisis

Of the East European countries that came under communist party rule in late 1940s, Czechoslovakia was one that had experienced both an exceptionally high rate of industrial development and progressive forms of bourgeois democracy. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia was the country that had suffered most under Stalinist domination. The model of Russian socialism had been imposed upon Czechoslovakia most forcefully and political repression had been inflicted with the greatest brutality. The Czechoslovak society reacted little to the liberalizing influences coming from post-Stalin Russia. Unlike Poland and Hungary Czechoslovakia experienced neither uprising nor the formation of political working class organizations; the intellectuals found themselves quite isolated from the rest of society and the old Stalinist leadership ran no risk at all of being overthrown. As a result, de-Stalinization in Czechoslovakia could not begin until about 1962-63. It was provoked by a general social crisis which manifested itself most explicitly as an economic crisis.45

Despite the limitations that the intellectual movement of 1956-58 faced in a repressed society, it was during these years that the foundation of alternative ways of thinking were being laid, ways different from those which had guided the first phase of socialist ‘realization’. Criticism of economic system led to an examination of civil and political rights. At issue was the total discrimination the political regime exercised over the individual’s choice of work, education and place of residence. Criticism was also directed at censorship and distortion of information, and at the regime’s dogmatism and servile imitation of Soviet Union. The very nature of Czech

socialism and the role of the working class within it began to be fundamentally questioned.46

In 1958, the political leadership temporarily silenced the stirring of opposition within the party. Still confident in itself and in its success, in 1960 it promulgated a new Constitution whereby the Czechoslovak popular democracy became a socialist republic. According to communist philosophy of history, this was to be taken as a sign of a new stage reached through an irreversible process.47 But already at the beginning of the 1960s the latest crisis of Czech socialism was becoming evident to its optimistic leadership. The crisis involved objective indicators of production and, as such, could not be ignored by the Czech leaders.

After a relatively long period characterized by high rates of development especially in the industrial sector. In the period 1948-65 their industry had a five-fold increase by 127 percent, till 1965 they possibly had the highest standard of living in the socialist world.48 This industrial growth rate was possible because of the old industrial base including a reservoir of skilled man power. However, after a long time the economy had began to show signs of recession in the industrial sector. In 1961, the industrial growth rate had dropped a couple of points and for the first time since 1953 the gross national product did not meet the planned objective.

46 Ibid, p.32.
Even more significant was the critical state of agriculture, which necessitated heavy import of food, thus seriously burdening the balance of payments. The crisis altogether implicated the economic plan which in imitation of Soviet Union placed an enormous degree of emphasis on the development of heavy industry which had downgraded the state of agriculture.

In 1968 Alexander Dubcek, a Slovak, replaced Antonin Novotony as the party leader at a time when nobody in the leadership was capable of facing the challenge of economic crisis. The Dubcek leadership discussed and began to initiate practical steps towards political, economic and social reforms. The leadership affirmed its loyalty to socialism and Warsaw pact but, at the same time, expressed the desire to improve relations with all the countries of the world regardless of their political and economic systems. A programme adopted in April 1968 set guidelines for a modern, humanist socialist democracy that would guarantee freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly and created independent courts, introduce multiple-choice secret ballot elections and effect economic reforms. The internal reforms and foreign policy statements of the Dubcek created concern among the Warsaw Pact countries. Czechoslovakia once regarded as pro-Soviet had turned into one resentful of the Soviet connection.

Soviet Policy Towards Crisis East Europe

The Soviet Union followed a very consistent policy towards East Europe since the installation of Communist regimes. However, the rigorous implementation Soviet model of system in all East European countries did not suit their local conditions.

Imitation of the Soviet model, which placed enormous emphasis on the development of heavy industry and collectivisation of agriculture proved to be a failure. As a result, severe economic crisis with wider social and political ramifications cropped up in East Europe in general and in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland in particular.

Before the main events which rocked Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, Yugoslavia had started with protesting against Soviet interference in its internal affairs. Yugoslavia no longer tolerated Soviet domination and finally broke away from Moscow. The Yugoslav incident was a matter of serious concern for the Soviet leadership. It had obvious reason to fear that other countries in East Europe might follow Yugoslavia’s path, the path towards socialism different from that of Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, therefore, took cautious step and expelled Yugoslavia from the Communist camp on june 1948 before the latter could make an impact on other East European countries. After some time another crisis came to the fore in East Germany which added to the woes and worries of the Soviet leadership. The year 1953 saw workers uprising in Berlin on the issue of work norms. The workers demanded withdrawal of work norms, government’s resignation and free election. The Soviet response to this uprising was surprisingly restrained. In spite of the first priority being the restoration of order, the Soviet Union, on 16 June 1953, refused to allow the East Berlin police chief an unrestrained freedom of action. Some important buildings in the major towns were taken over by the Red Army soldiers and at noon

51 Crampton, n.2, p.279.
on 17 June a state of emergency was declared. Action began some hours later when
the tanks rolled on to the streets and the revolt was put down by the Soviet army.52

The crisis in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland prepared the ground for
national uprising to demand for the political, economic and cultural liberalisation of
each of these societies. On the other hand, any rebellious activities for a
transformation of society would not be tolerated by the Soviet Union because that
would pose serious challenge not only to the Soviet concept of socialism but also to
the Soviet hegemony in the entire East European region. From this point of view the
uprisings in these countries were most traumatic events for the Soviets. These were
the occasions which tempted the Soviet Union for a military intervention in these
region since the second world war.53

Both in Hungary and Czechoslovakia violent and peaceful movements
simultaneously took place to demand radical economic and political reforms.
Revolutions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia directly challenged the Soviet political and
ideological interests. Undoubtedly, the Soviet leaders were unanimous in their
aversion to the demands for reforms in East Europe.54

The question may be asked as to the nature of a situation which would make
it impossible for a pre-perestroika Soviet Union to restrain its intervention to alter it.

52 Kinther and Klaeber, n.3, p.19.
53 David J.Dallin, Soviet Foreign Policy After Stalin (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott
54 Jiri Valenta, in Sara Mecklejohn Tarry, ed., Soviet Policy in Eastern Europe
In precise terms, the pre-perestroika Soviet Union would intervene if the following development took place:

(i) all censorship, restraints, and sanctions on freedom of expression in the press and freedom of expression and assembly were generally relaxed;
(ii) pressures developed for restoration of multi-party system which jeopardised the political monopoly of the communist party.
(iii) economic innovations were planned that would seriously dilute the socialist character of the economic order, returning some sectors of the economy to private hands and allowing a greater latitude for further expansion of the private sector;
(iv) parliamentary government was restored, the power responsibility, and accountability of which would be to the electorate rather than the communist party.55

It was indeed such developments which occurred in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 made the Soviet military intervention in these countries an inevitability. No doubt, provoked by anti-communist uprisings in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union conducted a full scale military intervention to prevent any kind of liberal transformation of the society. The obvious purpose of the Soviet intervention was to restore communist regimes and socialist order in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.56

In the case of Poland, almost similar developments took place in early 1980s. The Soviets considered the crisis as a threat to their security and the threat of force was always present in their dealing with the Polish leadership. However, they seemed

56 Ibid, p.100.
to prefer a conciliatory approach.\textsuperscript{57} They wanted the Polish leadership to cope with the crisis on its own, but in any case, the Soviet leadership never refrained from giving 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 PUWP. One could see implied threat in this Soviet methodology of conciliation. In contrast with the past practices the Soviet leadership preferred diplomacy in handing the Polish crisis of 1980s. For example, Brezhnev frequently reiterated his confidence in the ability of the Polish leadership to restore order in Poland without external help. The inevitable opposition of the West along with that of Polish Church and even Vatican to any Warsaw Pact intervention in Poland were reasons for Soviet caution about intervention.\textsuperscript{58} Thus from the beginning of 1981 onwards the only alternative to military intervention for the Soviet leadership was the conciliatory diplomatic approach towards Warsaw.

CONCLUSION

The crisis continued to emerge in one or other part of the East European region. Of these the most notable examples were the Hungarian, Czechoslovak and Polish crises of 1956, 1968 and 1980s respectively with far-reaching implications for the Soviet model of socialism. These events constituted why may be called systemic crisis of socialism in East Europe towards which a definite Soviet reaction was inevitable. However, there was a qualitative difference between the nature of Soviet


responses on the different occasions. While in 1956 and 1968 the Soviet Union felt confident enough to organise an almost united bloc intervention to crush reform movement, it could hardly afford to repeat the feat in Poland in early eighties. Quite obviously, the combination of internal and external circumstances on one occasion was different from that of other. The restraint displayed by the Soviet leadership on later occasion was clearly in recognition of the changing political realities of the time.