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Research Note: The Present Situation in Poland

Chester Nowak
Bridgewater State College

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For almost two years now the whole world has been watching with fascination the development of the present crisis in Poland that was preceded by economic difficulties brought about by Premier Edward Gierek's economic program. Gierek attempted to revitalize the Polish economy and modernize Polish industry in order to pay for more advanced western technology. His initial plan seemed viable; however, it failed largely because of the mismanagement and the corruptive practices of the party's bureaucrats. Consequently, as a result of the growing indebtedness to the West, Poland had to increase its exports at the expense of domestic markets, and this led to a rapid decline of the standard of living. It was under these circumstances that the strike in Gdansk began. Initially the strikers demanded the formation of trade unions free of governmental controls, the right to strike, freedom of the press, free Saturdays, and the resolution of a number of specific grievances. Faced with a general strike, the government gave in to most of these demands; and within a few months most of the working population of Poland joined the new union, which was named Solidarnosc (Solidarity).

Confronted by a nation united under one banner, the regime promised to introduce large-scale reforms, which were to be carried out in close cooperation with Solidarity and other segments of Polish society. But this apparent capitulation of a ruling Communist Party was only illusory, and the Polish experiment in democracy ended in a tragedy. On December 12, 1981, a military junta, led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, declared a martial law across Poland.

At present there does not seem to be a bright prospect for a peaceful and an amicable resolution of the problem. Just as before, the future course of the events in Poland will be influenced decisively by the Soviet Union. Here, looking into the crystal ball of the future, we can only be guided by the pattern of past Soviet behavior and by their official and unofficial pronouncements on the subject. On the basis of this kind of evidence one can point to a development in Moscow of a "maximalist" stand on the Polish question. It became apparent that from the very beginning the Soviets, following the teachings of Lenin, viewed the existence in Poland of free trade unions in a socialist state as an unacceptable aberration. They argued that in a socialist system, unions can exist only as a part of the state administration, and under strong party control. Moreover, Solidarity's demand that Polish industry be placed under the union's control and management was viewed as a return to the position condemned by Lenin himself.

Starting from this Leninist premise, Russian Party Secretary, Mikhail Suslov's hardliners in Moscow encouraged the pro-Soviet faction of the Polish Communist Party to sabotage the reforms. They hoped that it would intensify the radicalization process in Poland, and that the ensuing tensions would create more favorable conditions under which a military putsch by native Polish forces would be feasible. It seems that such an "invasion from within" looked more advantageous to them than the alternative of a direct intervention by the Soviet Army. Furthermore, the "suslovites" seemed to perceive the situation in Poland as a possible blessing in disguise; evidently, they think that it can provide an opportunity to rectify the "fundamental errors", which they believe existed in Poland ever since 1948. And to make the point clear, they emphasize that the difficulties which Poland faced were not caused by the socialist system, but by Polish deviations from the principles prescribed by the theories of Marx and Lenin. To the Russians, the existence in Poland of private farms, the lack of wide-scale collectivization, the presence of a powerful church, and the existence of some bourgeois freedoms indicated that the poles deviated from the Soviet model, which is the only model acceptable to the Suslov hardliners. Furthermore, after former Polish party leader Stanislaw Kania's speech at the Polish Party Congress in July of 1981, Suslov's "maximalists" became convinced that the Polish Party is unreliable: It deviated dangerously from the prescribed ideology, and it was ready to abandon the principle of "socialist centralism" under which the

6Newsweek, December 28, 1981.
8Pravda, September 5, 1980; Pravda October 5, 1980.
9Pravda, July 17, 1981.
10Literarna Gazeta, May 6 and May 13, 1981.
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Party, the State, and the Society were to be directly controlled by the party leadership.11

Apparently, Suslov believed that under the conditions developing in Poland these "fundamental errors" can be reversed. But drastic changes of this kind could not be carried out by a divided and unreliable party that was unable to control its own members. At this point, Suslov and his followers were convinced that the only reliable force in Poland, on which the Soviet Union could depend, was the Secret Police and the higher echelons of the Polish army.12

One might prognosticate that if the hardliners win the upper hand in Moscow, the present military junta in Poland might be used to purge completely the existing Party and replace it with a new party along the lines of Marxist-Leninist model identical with that of the Soviet Union. A large and radical purge of this sort would not be strange to the Soviet experience, and it would probably be even more bloody than the one accompanying Stalin's dissolution of the Polish Communist party in 1938.13 But a drastic change like this would initiate a new era of Stalinism within the Soviet empire which might have an adverse effect on the relations between the two superpowers. Of course, there is always the outside chance that the present military regime in Poland might find a modus vivendi to defuse the existing conflict between itself and the Polish people, and to restore some semblance of political and economic stability. But in this respect, the Western response to the Polish crisis is of crucial importance: How the West reacts to it will probably determine the nature of its relations with the Soviet world for a generation to come. Here, one can make a strong case for the argument that if the West continues to respond to the Polish crisis as it did to the Afghanistan affair, the long-term consequences of "doing business as usual" might be detrimental to its own self-interest, and it could contribute to further destabilization of Eastern Europe that might be prejudicial to the general peace.


CULTURAL COMMENTARY

Our Strengthened Ties To Quebec

The value of residence in a foreign country received amusing testimony in an exchange overheard in front of Fanueil Hall on Patriot's Day. A preppy undergraduate asked his Scandinavian guest of the same age: "Do you have fried bread in Sweden?" The American may or may not have known that his fried bread has its origin in Navajo culinary tradition, a heritage that our forbearers did their best to eradicate during a painful conquest of the American Southwest. The Swedish guest may or may not have recognized the resemblance of the friend's bread to the pastry served in his country, and elsewhere in Europe as well. Eating habits rank among the most interesting but commonplace points of comparison when two cultures come into daily association.

Contact between the two cultures involves the trivial and the momentous, however, as BSC students will learn when they participate in the Quebec Exchange Program offered next year for the first time. Ties between BSC and the Quebec Province were strengthened by the recent signing of a reciprocal agreement that provides for student exchanges among nine Quebec institutions and twenty-three colleges and universities in New England. Under the terms of the accord, a BSC student pays BSC tuition, and, other expenses would be comparable to those on our own campus. Signatories encourage students from all disciplines to apply for the exchange.

The academic attractions of a Quebec sojourn span a range of issues that stem from a colonized people's effort to retain ethnic identity amidst vast socializing forces set in motion by the colonizing nation. Our undergraduate can sample the eternal debate on anglophone (mostly American) domination of Canada's mineral wealth and our pervasive grip on the arts in Canada. The particular advantage of the Quebec program is that one lives in a "foreign" environment where one can survive reasonably well without native command of the local language or even without any familiarity with local language. An advantage of equal importance in the 1980's is that even a rudimentary language skill can develop into a vehicle for understanding the cultural strife that currently fires political and social debate in Quebec.

This recent agreement is only one more example of the close ties between Canada and BSC. The Canadian government currently uses the Maxwell Library as an official selected document depository, a service which BSC alone enjoys among Massachusetts State Colleges. The National Film Board of Canada provides films for BSC French courses and the Quebec Province Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs furnishes materials for our Canadian Studies Office and speakers for BSC classes. Most recently, the Quebec Ministry partially funded Professor Stanley Hamilton's sabbatical leave to research the contemporary French Canadian novel.

The BSC Canadian Studies Program, chaired by Professor John Myers of the History Department, provides a range of interdisciplinary courses to undergraduate and graduate students. Members of the program are active in a variety of professional conferences in the field. For example, Professor Philip Silvia presented a paper entitled "Neighbors from the

Assumption College Conference on Les Petits Canadas de la Nouvelle Angleterre, held on March 14, 1982. Left to right - Professor John Myers, Professor Philip Silvia, Mr. Ronald Petrin, and Professor Stanley Hamilton.