

De-Stalinization of Poland and Sino Soviet Relations

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Introduction

Exterior appearances are not always accurate representations of real life. While from a western perspective, the USSR was a cohesive body that fully believed in Communism; the communist world was a very dynamic system that had many competing factions, political feuds, and uprisings. Most of the tumultuous history behind the Iron Curtain is not taught in Western schools. Throughout this paper, the author will explore de-Stalinization that led to the Poznan uprising of 1956 and the Hungarian Revolution. Additionally, the author will briefly explore China's rise to Communism and the negative effects of de-Stalinization on Sino-Soviet relations.

Uprisings

World War II was a catastrophic war that redefined modern Europe. As part of war reparations, many Eastern European nations -including Poland and Hungary- were put under the 'protection' of the USSR. The Soviet social engineering changed life in Poland almost as much as the war. While the imposition of the Soviet model was slower in Poland compared to other eastern countries, Poland was urbanized and industrialized by a modern working class (6). Fearing a revolt, Stalin limited the pace of agricultural collectivization making Poland the only communist state where individual small landholders form vast majority of peasantry (7).

From the late 1940's to the early 1950's the eastern bloc was ruled by 'Stalinism'. The period was defined by authorities expanding control over social groups, society, and individuals. It, "Imposed a monologue by closing communication systems between

the rulers and the ruled" (2). The system protected the top three percent of the population from shortages and granted those same people special privileges -while the rest of the population starved and slaved away. Throughout the eastern bloc, there was strict subordination to the state. The Catholic Church (representing an alternative Polish government) was persecuted as the Soviets attempted to foment anti-clerical sentiment in society. The economy was rigidly controlled by the government -with accelerated development of heavy industry being a priority in central planning. Nearly all commercial and industrial enterprises were taken over by state control (7). Any form of revolt was risky. While operating as a police state, hundreds of thousands of people were arrested and sent to the gulag in Siberia, Russia. For example, in 1953, *after* Stalin's death, ten thousand people were arrested in Poznan (9); meanwhile, several thousand members of the clergy was arrested around Poland (7).

After Stalin's death in 1953, Moscow was divided on how to best continue leading the Communist party -and how to deal with the atrocities of Stalinism. In 1956, the new leader, Nikita Khrushchev released a 'secret speech' at the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that denounced Stalin's tyrannical ruling and blamed several rival soviet leaders for colluding with Stalin (1). In most of the Eastern bloc, the speech was kept to the party's inner circles; however, in Poland local leaders called for the the publication to be multiplied five-fold from three thousand copies to fifteen thousand copies (2). Additionally, the speech was read off publically in party meetings. Covering a variety of topics: it recognized the general population's deep-seated alienation against the Communist party, the election rigging that allowed

the Communists to rise to power after World War II, Stalinist failed economic policies -especially the failed attempts to collectivize agriculture, attacks on the Catholic Church, and unlawful imprisonment of tens of thousands of people (1). There was political motivation, as the speech framed Khrushchev as the savior of Communism.

Three weeks after the Secret Speech, the First Secretary of the Polish Communist Worker's Party, Boleslaw Bierut, was 'found' dead while in Moscow attending the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. A hard line Stalinist, his death was mysterious, although the Communist Party tried to report he died a natural death resulting from a cold (3). It was later revealed he was poisoned. Instead of being buried traditionally in Wawel Castle in Krakow, at Moscow's bidding he was buried in a military cemetery in Warsaw. It was the start of many tensions coming to light in Poland.

Poland had been wronged many times by the Soviet Union. In 1939, they were invaded by Russian soldiers from the east as Hitler marched across the west. In 1940, over twenty thousand Polish soldiers and police had been murdered at Katyn. In 1944, there had been minimal Soviet support for the Warsaw Uprising (4). In the new *Polish* army, many high ranking Polish officers were *Russian* and did not even speak Polish. Students argued about the extensive control on media. The student group The Club of Crooked Circle complained to Central Committee that we are, "Unable to understand why British citizens can listen freely to programs in English from Warsaw, while Poles may not listen to the Polish service of BBC" (2).

Recognizing the possibility for rebellion, the Communists made amends granting amnesty and releasing over 36,000 unlawfully arrested prisoners (1). They recognized Stalin's reign of terror by arresting known interrogators and torturers including the former deputy minister of public security: Roman Romkowski, and the former director of the 10th department of ministry: Anatol Fejgin. Additionally, they updated the government by dismissing the Minister of Justice: Henryk Świątkowski, the prosecutor general, and the chief military prosecutor (4). The personnel of the security force 'bezpieka' was reduced by twenty-two percent. This change in leadership and reduction of police marked the end of Stalinism in Poland.

Poles wanted public life to be conducted in 'openness and sincerity' (2). Frustrated with stores not having supplies or food; a Polish workers revolt due to acute economic distress unfolded in Poznan in June 1956. Laborers in the locomotive plant sent several delegates to Warsaw to request five demands including a twenty percent wage increase and lower prices. After not hearing back for several days (and fearing their acquaintances had been imprisoned) (4), over fifty-thousand people marched to Plac Wolnosci on Thursday June 27, 1956 (9) chanting religious and national slogans. The protest was composed mostly of industrial workers (the backbone of the Soviet economy), so the Russian police had orders to not shoot. The revolt wore on through the weekend, turning violent when protestors destroyed the Soviet radio jammers aimed at Western stations (2). While the final casualty count was unclear, the revolt lasted the entire weekend and resulted with an estimated seventy people dead and over six hundred injured (1).

The communists were not prepared for a revolt of this magnitude. The uprising conveniently took place during the Twenty-fifth Annual Poznan Trade Fair which had attracted many Western journalists. A workers uprising was a major embarrassment for a regime that claimed to be a *Workers Party* during the *Trade Fair*. In attempt to smooth over the tensions, the Communist Party praised Polish leaders and released a declaration admitting problems and mistakes. They publically recognized the importance of mutual relationships between socialist countries; however, they also noted that the socialist cause was new on the history of mankind and could not be immune from errors of one kind or another (1).

The Poznan revolt was not the only headache for the Communist leadership. On October 23, 1956 rising unrest broke out into active fighting in Budapest, Hungary. Catching the Soviets off guard, the rebels won the first phase of revolution -instating the westernizer and moderate Imre Nagy as premier and establishing a multiparty system. On the first day of his (short) reign, he declared freedom of speech and freedom of religion. On November 1st, nine days after fighting broke out, Hungary declared neutrality from the Communists and appealed to the United Nations for support. Fearing a large scale war with Russia, the Western powers were hesitant to intervene. On November 3rd, Hungary declared it was leaving the Warsaw Pact. Able to take no more, Khrushchev agreed to invade Hungary to solidify the Union. On November 4th, the Soviets invaded Budapest with one thousand tanks -killing over four thousand people. They removed Nagy from power (executing him in 1958), but the Stalinist exploitation and domination did not return (14). The uprising was especially

advantageous for the Poles because it distracted the Russian leaders from just reacting to the Polish revolt, instead forcing Moscow to reconsider their Eastern Bloc policies.

Soviet Reactions

In the wake of two major uprisings, Moscow believed de-Stalinization had gone too far. Communist leaders argued that the time for self-criticism was over and began to reframe communism in a more positive light. They claimed the Poznan Uprising was the work of imperialist agents who were just attempted to sow discord among the great Communist powers (2). Fearing more revolutionary action in Poland, Russia threatened to invade if the leading candidate for the 'presidency', Władysław Gomułka, was elected.

A nationalist nation, Poland elected Władysław Gomułka to become First Secretary of Polish United Workers Party (8) on October 1, 1956 (2). The election was the first time popular opinion had influenced a change at the top of any communist government (7). Gomułka had been a prominent Polish party leader before being arrested by Stalin supporters in 1948 (2). Being a victim of Stalinist repression, his first speech in Warsaw denounced Stalinism and threatened a rebellion against established order (8). Within weeks of being elected, Gomułka ended agricultural collectivism allowing agriculture to remain in hands of private farmers rather than the state (1). Additionally, he freed more political prisoners (7), and improved relations with the Catholic Church. While he was listening to Polish complaints and fixing many of the problems from Stalinization, Gomułka was very smart in his dealings with the other

Communist leaders around the world. He avoided invasion by the Soviet army by assuring Khrushchev that Poland was not withdrawing from Warsaw Pact (8) (a feat Hungary was unable to claim). His rule represented a largely non-violent transition from Stalinism to more moderately run communist authoritarian regime (1).

Unfortunately, Gomułka's leadership was still disappointing to Poles who had hoped for more progressive reform. Being a Marxist-Leninist, Gomułka retained a Soviet-Socialist identity in addition to a deeply nationalistic perspective on Communism (9). He directed the Polish attention to foreign threats abroad and within and emphasized the need for ethno-national and political Polish unity. "[He] Filled out that form with (Endecja) nationalist content... rehabilitated the anti-German vision of Polish nationalism" (9). His policies only favored the reforms necessary to secure public toleration of the Communist party's dominion and failing to dismantle the fundamentals of the Stalinist system (7). While he stopped the collective agriculture and improved the life of the farmers, his government did not make substantial change in the economy or increase the standard of living for Poles (8).

The uprisings of 1956 were incredibly important for all the nations of the Communist bloc. They ushered in a new era of weakening of supreme government authority that eroded the foundations of bloc unity. There was a growing demand for independence and autonomy among soviet satellites as nations looked to be more equal and nationalistic. Additionally, politics was growing increasingly complex as the relationship between Beijing and Moscow became more terse and the Sino-Soviet relationship between the Russians and the Chinese eroding (10).

Brief History of Sino-Soviet Relations

At the turn of the twentieth century, China was politically unstable. The last imperial dynasty collapsed in 1912 after three hundred years of rule. Some Chinese philosophers recognized the need for China to modernize their government system to adapt to the rapid population increase and cope with new technologies. After the Revolt of 1911, there were several attempts to create a people's democracy but all of them were weak and dominated by Chinese war lords (16).

In the 1920's the newly settled Russian Communist Party sent advisors to China to aid fledgling Communist movement. In the 1930's, thanks to movement from the mobilisation of the Chinese peasantry; Mao Zedong rose against Chinese government and created a *people's* government. While Communist in nature, it differed from the Marxist/Leninist/Stalinists ideology focuses on the struggle of working class; nevertheless, the USSR was more than happy to support another Communist nation. In the wake of the Japanese invasion of World War II and decades of intercountry warfare, Mao Zedong was officially elected as ruler of China in 1949. After several extended visits between Putin and Mao, in 1950 the two leaders signed the *Treaty of Friendship*. Designed to strengthen Communism in China, the Russians sent over three hundred million dollars in loans at one percent interest (16) in addition to sending twenty thousand 'experts' who helped China implement and improve communist ideology (according to Soviet standards) (11).

After Stalin's death in 1953, there was a vacuum of leadership and guidance in the Communist movement. Mao Zedong considered Khrushchev to be inferior to Stalin and himself (Mao) and believed he should be recognized as senior Communist leader. Leaders in Russia instead recognized Khrushchev as the supreme leader (16). Tensions began to rise between the two nations after the 1956 uprising when the USSR clearly began putting their own interests (and the interests of their subordinate states) above those of their Chinese allies (11).

As distance grew between the two powers, the Chinese and Soviets began to differ in their interpretation of Communist documentation. Russian Communism wanted more friendly relations with Western countries as demonstrated through friendly relations with the United States with the Spirit of Camp David. Nikita Khrushchev described his view of Communism to German workers gathered in Leipzig in March 1959, "Speaking of the future it seems to me that the further development of the socialist countries will in all likelihood proceed along the lines of consolidation of the single world socialist economic system" (13). However, the Chinese described this policy as the "policy of abandoning principle and creating splits" (13). They believed in a more monogamous bloc unity led by Moscow leadership. Additionally, they desired a harsher foreign bloc policy -particularly towards the United States (11).

Rebellions in Eastern Europe showed communism was unable to overcome nationalism ties among bloc countries. Peking, believing Soviet behavior imperilled Chinese ambitions insisted that Chinese interpretation of Leninist documents could save Communism from harm (11). In 1956, the Chinese communists took this policy

disagreement with Moscow public after Khrushchev denounced Stalinism at the XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Chinese Papers wrote:

“Stalin's life was that of a great Marxist-Leninist, a great proletarian revolutionary. For thirty years after Lenin's death, Stalin was the foremost leader of the CPSU and the Soviet Government, as well as the recognized leader of the international communist movement and the standard-bearer of the world revolution. During his lifetime, Stalin made some serious mistakes, but compared to his great and meritorious deeds his mistakes are only secondary... [Khrushchev] completely negated Stalin, and in doing so defamed the dictatorship of the proletariat, defamed the socialist system, the great CPSU, the great Soviet Union and the international communist movement.”

(13)

Chinese Influence in the Wake of Eastern Europe Uprisings

Mao Zedong believed in perceived party unity. On October 23, 1956 he wrote “Stalin deserves to be criticized, but we do not agree with the method of criticism, and there are some other matters we do not agree with.” As the Chinese wanted Communist countries to remain more monogamous; it was not unusual though for them to intervene in Soviet politics (11). In 1956, evidence obtained by the United States Central Intelligence Agency indicates the Chinese encouraged the Poles to revolt and earn obtain greater autonomy from Moscow. Meanwhile, they also advised Khrushchev to

not invade Poland with the Red Army (11). It was a different story in Hungary. While the Chinese supported the Hungarian desires for national autonomy (similar to Poland); Mao Zedong quickly changed his mind when Nagy declared he was leaving the Warsaw Pact. Seeing the withdrawing as a sign of counter revolution, the Chinese accused the USSR of insufficient revolutionary fervor and encouraged Moscow to attack Budapest with force. Mao Zedong viewed the USSR government as 'tactically indecisive and floundering' (15) and after the uprisings, warned the Soviet Leadership to avoid 'Great Power of Chauvinism'.

In the wake of the two large anti-communist uprisings, Mao Zedong stopped encouraging autonomy in the Soviet Bloc (11). While he recognized the Polish and Hungarian Uprisings with the result of long standing errors in governing and that the post-Stalin regime was guilty of *big national chauvinism* (15); he blamed Khrushchev's secret speech at the XXth Congress of the Communist Party for the deluge of revolutionist ideas sweeping Europe (5). To encourage unity, he sent a Chinese diplomat to Poland and Hungary to remind the countries to respect the USSR's position as the leader of the Soviet Bloc.

After the Polish and Hungarian revolutions, China was becoming the champion of national equality in the Socialist camp. Poland appreciated her, "...good and tried friend" (15). Initially, the intervention was not resented by the USSR because the Chinese were champions of national equality in the Socialist camp and looked to Moscow's leadership. However, as time progressed, disagreements among the countries increased as a power struggle began (11).

Dissolving of Sino-Soviet Relations

As time progressed, China continually tried to expand their presence in the global sphere and voiced harsh anti-American rhetoric (13). Mao Zedong did not fear a nuclear war (believing it would weaken Russia and the United States and allow China to rise to power) (16). Moscow pushed back. In 1958, the CPSU introduced legislation to bring China under Soviet military control. In 1959 Russia tore up an agreement that promised to give the Chinese an atomic bomb sample and technical data concerning its manufacturing in addition to new national defense technology (13). In a game of he-said-she said, both governments began vocalizing their distaste of the other. At the third annual Romanian Workers Party Convention in Bucharest in June 1960, Khrushchev unleashed anti-Chinese rhetoric. In July the Chinese complained that Soviet leadership had committed an extensive amount of ideological mistakes (12). In response, the Soviets recalled all 'experts' in China and banned publication of certain Chinese papers in Russia. Additionally, they halted the distribution of a Soviet publication in China. Troubled brewed on the Sino-Soviet border as the two nations grew further and further apart (13). Evidence of these strains still exist today.

Reflection

When choosing this topic, I wanted to learn about something that has a lasting effect on modern politics. Before starting, I knew that Poland and China had both lived under abominable leadership during the Communist era, but had not heard of

de-Stalinization and never realized people had revolted in Poznan or Budapest. I chose my topic believing that both countries would have a shared past of resisting the tyrannical Soviets. On initial research, my hunch appeared correct. The Central Intelligence Agency article written in 1960 mentioned the Chinese had encouraged the Poles to revolt and had convinced the Russians not to invade. However, out of respect for Moscow leadership, the Chinese seemed to avoid involving themselves in many Eastern Bloc politics. China and Poland were friends in the 1950's and many Chinese students studied in Polish schools to be educated as 'real communists'. Additionally, the Polish sold many old Russian tanks to China to equip the Chinese tanker units -boosting the Polish economy while increasing Chinese military strength.

What interested me the most in my research and writing was the drastic difference in the effects of de-Stalinization. In Poland, de-Stalinization strengthened the Communist movement as Gomułka united the country and put a human face on Communism. Some of the restrictive ideas such as collective agriculture were discarded and Poland was given more autonomy to approach Communism with a more national sense. In contrast, de-Stalinization led to the collapse of Sino-Soviet relations. Mao Zedong viewed Khrushchev as a threat to traditional Communism and desired autonomy amongst the Communist states. China believed in 'just protests' (like the Poznan uprising for fair wages and bread) but smashed down 'Western protests' (like the Hungarian Uprising to leave the Warsaw Pact). The years after de-Stalinization led China down a challenging path where Mao introduced the Five Year plan (and

subsequent famine) and found themselves embroiled in the Korean War and Vietnam, War.

In writing this paper I have learned so much about the politics of the Cold War. People did resist the atrocities of Communism and many died fighting it. Additionally, the two sects of Communism (Chinese and Russian) diverged very early and led to an ideological battle in the East. The Poles seemed more independent than many other bloc nations -and continually caused the Russians headache. They were one of the only bloc countries to maintain their religion and the first to allow popular opinion to alter a Communist election. While China and Poland did not have as strong a political connection I had initially believed, in writing this paper I have earned a deeper respect for Polish politics and the Polish people.

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