

Eastern Europe, cont'd

Lecture No. 0023 (March 13, 1974)

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Preliminary remarks

[*Inaudible*] ... literally, of all of the dates that I have mentioned to you this term, this is the one that is really significant [*laughter*], the only one you really don't have any responsibility for. In fact, I'd like to find out... [*inaudible, laughter*].

Lecture

There they were, between 1953 and 1956, the new Soviet leaders. Old apparatchik they were, those new Soviet leaders, in general — the successors of Stalin, and desperately trying to find some way, after all, of maintaining a system which had nurtured them. And trying to maintain that system, if you please, by throwing Stalin's bones to the wolves. A rather pathetic gesture, in a sense, this attempt really to master or to mute the dialectics of change. Because, you see, Heraclitus told us, and told us very well, that no human being can step into the same river twice: that history and society and nature itself are in constant flux and in constant movement. And here you get these new Soviet leaders, after all, Khrushchev and his company, throwing pebbles into this river of society and this river of history and making little eddies in it, and assuming then that the river stays quite the same, and that they can predict its course and that they control its course. And all of that is impossible.

Because from the very first gestures of de-Stalinization in 1953 and 1954, those gestures of de-Stalinization really hit to the very ragged nerve endings of peoples in all of those East European societies, who knew very much better than Khrushchev and his colleagues what the deep contradictions of their societies happened to be. And then, when in February of 1956 Khrushchev was to make his great secret speech before the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Union — he was to make a speech in which he denounced, very centrally, Stalin; in which he denounced, very centrally, all of the crimes that he attributed to Stalin — and he tried, if you please, to control that speech. He made it in secret, and he hoped that it would circulate only in certain restricted quarters so that certain policies could be taken, but not, after all, to get really out into the public. And all of that was impossible.

And that speech did trickle out, and the implications of it did dig in deeply, and they began to be felt. And, you see, within a period of months, by October of 1956, you are going to have tremendous explosions, explosions in Poland and in Hungary. And when those explosions, after

all, are contained, that doesn't end the story at all. And you go years later and you have those explosions in the summer of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, which are all of the same piece. And, to be sure, that Soviet power was strong enough and Soviet power was efficient enough to go into those exploded areas and to extinguish those explosions — to douse, after all, the movements that had begun. But then, you see, an explosion is a blinding light. And in a blinding light, you see things. And so those people who made those explosions in Poland and in Hungary and later in Czechoslovakia saw what socialism might be, saw what socialism should be — saw, if you please what socialism will be.

And so it was, after all, in the wake of that 20th Congress of February of 1956, that the Soviet leadership and that leadership over Eastern Europe began to make the implications of that speech felt by one reform after another, which reforms the Soviet leadership really tried to contain — in other words, tried to make it very concrete and very specific so that they did not threaten the system. Because it was the system, after all, that was at stake.

And so you have that action of the 17th of April of 1956, which is terribly important in terms of its implications. Because on that date, the Cominform is dissolved. And that is terribly important because we know, after all, why Stalin formed the Cominform in 1947. He did it, of course, in reaction to the imperialism of the West, to the development of a Truman Doctrine and a Marshall Plan. But, basically, what that Cominform meant was Soviet hegemony over Eastern Europe. What it meant was the imposition of the Soviet model very, very harshly upon the countries of Eastern Europe. What is meant was the subordination of all of those countries to Soviet rule. And now, what is the implication of the dissolution of the Cominform?

It means, if you please, in the first place, that there was the implication that monolithic systems of socialism had to go — that, after all, you had very many ways of making socialism. It implies the principle of polycentrism, which is, after all, exactly what [Imre] Nagy in Hungary, or [Władysław] Gomułka in Poland had insisted upon in 1948, what Tito was insisting upon: that every country ought, by its own resources and by the will of its own people to find its own road to socialism and make its own model.

And there is yet a second imperialism. And that second implication of the Cominform is the end of Soviet hegemony. What is really built into the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1954, which is the equality of socialist countries one to the other; what is built into that joint declaration of that joint declaration of 1955 between Tito and Khrushchev, which is, again, the idea of the equality of socialist countries — likewise built into the implications of the dissolution of the Cominform.

But here is the point. The point is that, even though those were the implications, the Russians tried to mute those implications and to contain them. Always, you see, it is this question of unleashing something and then trying to call it back. Because, after all, the Warsaw Pact remains

intact. Now, the Warsaw Pact was formed in May of 1955. And it was entered into as a response to that fact of March of '55: West Germany went into the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance, and consequently would be rearmed. And what the Warsaw Pact was, was a meeting of the East European countries with the Russians in the city of Warsaw in May of 1955 to establish a military alliance, that those East European countries would now recognize the leadership, militarily and politically, of the Soviet Union. And what the Warsaw Pact was, after all, was justification of the Soviets for keeping their troops in Hungary and keeping them in Romania. And it would become likewise the justification, under the principle of mutual military aid, for the Russians to intervene then in Hungary in November of 1956, and again to intervene in Czechoslovakia in August of 1968. And so the Warsaw Pact is not negated, after all, by this dissolution of the Cominform.

Or take, in the second place, the very idea that the Russians still were intervening directly into the political decisions and the political affairs of these East European countries. Almost simultaneously with this dissolution of the Cominform occurred a crisis of leadership in Poland, and the Russians were very much there on the scene. What had happened was that the chief of the Polish Communist movement, Bolesław Bierut — Bierut had gone to the 20th Congress as the representative of the Polish Party, and he was an old Stalinist, Bierut, and when he went up there and he heard Khrushchev make that Secret Speech, somehow he was struck with anguish, and in his anguish he did what was one of the creative things in his whole life — he dropped dead! Obviously, there was a vacuum at the leadership in the Polish Communist movement. And the threat was, after all, there might be Gomułka — that some arch-reformer would be brought in to head that Polish movement. And consequently, it was Khrushchev himself who, in the middle of March of 1956, went off to Poland to make sure that the succession to Bierut would be a safe succession. And the one who was chosen was one Edward Ochab. And Ochab was an old Stalinist who at least was flexible enough to do the things that Khrushchev thought had to be done; in other words, to make a very slow de-Stalinization and that was all.

So you see the point. The point is that there are moves, and then there are countermoves to try to contain the implications of the whole de-Stalinization. And can you really do it? Consider the fact of "rehabilitation." And rehabilitation, so much a very important part of this story: the idea that if you denounce the crimes of Stalin, you have to rehabilitate the militants who have been his victims. And yet rehabilitation is such an explosive issue. Because, if you rehabilitate old Communists — who have opposed this Stalinism, who have opposed these bureaucratic parties — don't you have to rehabilitate their ideas also? And it is for that reason that [Mátyás] Rákosi in Hungary for example, refused any rehabilitations. He would not rehabilitate [László] Rajk, he would not rehabilitate Nagy, because that opened up the whole question of whether the system might not itself be put on the spot. Or in East Germany, there you have [Walter] Ulbricht, and he says, "Thank God we never had a Slánský trial, and we never had a Rajk trial, and we don't have to rehabilitate anybody. And consequently, our system is safe." But, you see, in Poland, they

started to rehabilitate. And consequently, Gomulka, who had been in prison from 1950 on, is let out of prison in the early months of 1956, and Ochab, who is the new chief of the Party, has to make a special speech on the 6th of April of 1956 to say that, if we let Gomulka out of prison, we are not supporting his ideas, that Gomulka is not rehabilitated.

But, you see, that is so very hard to handle. And hard to handle because all of this de-Stalinization, ultimately, gets into "bad hands": it gets into the hands of the intellectuals. And, you see, the intellectuals who have really been under wraps in Eastern Europe — as soon as there begins to be some kind of greater freedom or some kind of restraint upon the police systems — they begin to get into the act. And once the intellectuals get hold of de-Stalinization, then it becomes not an ad hoc kind of movement, but it becomes systematic. In other words, it becomes an analysis of the system, and that begins to become dangerous. Now, let me not exaggerate the role of the intellectuals. Or let me not glorify them too much.

Let this be said, for example, that the whole beginning of de-Stalinization, the whole beginning of some kind of loosening of that structure, came from the Russian leadership itself. That should never be forgotten: those Russian leaders, after all, who did what they had to do to save their own skin. You see the problem they were facing. The problem they were facing was the one that Vercors [pseudonym of Jean Bruller] talked about in *Le Silence de la mer*; in other words, it was like the occupation that the Germans had to have in Europe: that they encountered populations that met them with stony silence, that collaborated only ostensibly, but that really didn't give any internal commitment to that Nazi occupation. And that, suddenly, is what these Communist chiefs are facing. How can they make a system work? How can they make the economy work? How can they make for some kind of expansion of their societies, if the people are living as in a frozen sea, if they are giving only ad hoc, only rote responses to the propaganda, to the exhortations that are directed to them? In other words, what Khrushchev and his crew had to do was to try to thaw this frozen sea, to treat the human beings who lived in that Eastern zone not just as objects, but at least as some kind of subjects in history whose rights, whose elemental rights, had at least to be heard (or at least, in some manner, to be respected), or else would simply let that whole system die of its own attrition. And consequently, they began this de-Stalinization.

Now, the intellectuals — not only in Russia, but in Eastern countries — the intellectuals were not in on that de-Stalinization at the beginning. And you must understand that because, you see, many of those intellectuals were enthusiastic Communists who had gone into the revolutionary movement in 1944 or 1945, in the resistance movement. They were young men and young women. And they really had a belief in the building of communism, in the building of a new society. But, as intellectuals, they began to move with the movement of their system. In other words, they began to get sucked into the system and to do its particular work. Those intellectuals, after all, in all of the Eastern countries were set something apart. They were paid better; they

were given honors; they were given, really, differentiation and distance from the working class itself. We have a marvelous description of that particular phenomenon by Borys Czapski [*Goldberg might be erroneously referring to Józef Czapski*], who is himself a Polish writer, and who writes in 1956, "We intellectuals became inflated with self-importance, avid for fame, puffed up on undeserved rewards, so that we had no contact at all with ordinary people, with the poor masses who were more silent, and yet truer to their humility than we were." And what Borys Czapski tells us is that it's so easy to get them to sell what is their basic commitment to truth and to justice which, presumably, had launched them into the movement to begin with.

And you see, parenthetically, what that tells you. It tells you what [Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio] Gramsci knew so very well: that most of the time, in most societies, intellectuals are what Gramsci called orthodox or traditional intellectuals. They are the ones who do the propaganda for the establishment — whatever the establishment happens to be — make the gloss on the particular policies of those who are the ruling classes or those who are the ruling interests of the society. And, for the most part, they get very good rewards for that particular thing.

And you get that through all of history. You get it in the concept of mandarin. Mandarin comes out of Chinese history, after all. And it is precisely the mandarins who are the gloss upon the imperial system of China and who provide it, after all, with its intellectual base. And you get, for example, that famous dialogue (which may be an apocryphal dialogue, to be sure) about that meeting (which may be an apocryphal meeting) between Confucius and Lao Tzu. And it was said that Kong Tzu, or Confucius, was wandering about in the era of the Warring States. And he was going from state to state, presumably as a philosopher to try to teach justice to these tyrants in that period of the Warring States, and he ran into Lao Tzu on the road, who said, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I'm going to tyrants to make them just." And Lao Tzu said, "Well, you see, a philosopher who goes into the service of a tyrant doesn't make him just, but it is the ruler who tyrannizes the intellectual" — and consequently makes him a servant of that power. And we talk about the German mandarin of the period of the Hohenzollern empire, after all, who did their duty in terms of substantiating and buttressing that particular imperialistic regime.

But you do have to go out of your own time and your own place. Are you not in a time and place, after all, where your American intelligentsia, especially the university intelligentsia, has been so much in the service of power and so long in the service of power, that it has forgotten what a critical function really is in terms of its relationship to any given society. And so we have lived through a time when the entire establishment of political science has played games of dominos with us and told us, after all, that we were fighting for some abstract justice in the world if we were pursuing the ends of American policy. And we have had the sociologists tell us, as macrosociologists, that we have come to a postindustrial era in which tensions of a class sort no longer exist. And we have the anthropologists down examining those simple societies to find out how you control them so that their insurgency, consequently, can be defeated. And you have,

yes, you have those historians — and so many of those historians — who have documented for you — from the beginning of time and will continue to do so — that America, after all, has achieved a consensus society. And consequently, that all of those things that are friction are really dysfunction which some psychologist will ultimately drain out of the system.

It's all very much — it's all out of Molière! And all you have to do is to go to any meeting — well, I'll tell you, parenthetically, incidentally, I'm into the business now, in secret, of trying to make a record. And I'm going to try to make a record, you see — I'm carrying around secret tape recorders, and I go to academic meetings, and I'm going to have the funniest Christmas record in history. Because I'm going to get really good academic meetings down, and then I'm going to interpolate my own rhetorical remarks to indicate what it is that the mandarins are thinking and talking about in this day, after all, of 1974. But, you see, it's all like those doctors in *Le Malade imaginaire*, because they stand around the bedside while the patient is dying, and they say, "Bleed him, bleed him, bleed him." Well, the modern academic doesn't say that in America. He says, "More articles, more articles, more articles." And consequently, you establish your standards of that kind. Well, it's all *au contraire*, to be sure. And, consequently, intellectuals are very frequently into that bag.

When do they change? The eighteenth century gives us the perfect example of it, the French eighteenth century, with all of that great philosophical and liberal movement. When do the intellectuals change or when do they become relevant? At that time, after all, when there are morphological changes in the society; when there are new sources of social power, to which they can address themselves and for which they can speak: at that time that there are conjunctural crises, in which there are options and real choices in society. What I'm saying is that the intelligentsia by itself will serve an establishment until such time as there are genuine social forces, after all, which enable it to take another long view and another particular position. And surely that raises the question as to what good the [Alexander] Solzhenitsyns do now, for example, if you do not have that bottom-up protest in the Soviet Union with some serious kind of social force that is really going to contest the bureaucratic class, which really is in power seat in that particular country.

Well, what happened, you see, with the East European intelligentsia — and it is important — what happened is that there were cracks in the system. And those cracks in the system really were revealed by the de-Stalinization. And these intellectuals came, and they began to widen those cracks to tear them open. And, you see, you have only to read anthologies of the writings of Polish and Hungarian intellectuals in 1956 and '57 to find out something extraordinary. And that is that as de-Stalinization began, they suddenly saw themselves for what they were. In other words, terrific shame — there was terrific mea culpa, there was terrific self-criticism. Because they had sung the praises of Stalin, and they had calumniated Rajk or Slánský or Tito. And suddenly they saw that all of that was a lie. And once they saw that all of that was a lie. And

once they saw that, they went much further than the de-Stalinizers. They had to make up for all of that kind of capitulation that they had been into. And consequently, they moved these ad hoc actions of de-Stalinization into a systematic pattern.

And the intellectuals of Eastern Europe, especially of Poland and Hungary, begin to ask relevant questions. They begin to say, "Is this dictatorship of the proletariat really a dictatorship of a bureaucratic Party?" And there you get a Julian Hochfeld, for example, in Poland, who in April 1956 for the first time does the great, "No, no." He mentions the name Rosa Luxemburg, and he circulates around a little bit of her criticism of what a bureaucrat is. And they ask the question of whether centralized economies, after all, are legitimate if you are to have new social relations; whether you don't have an economy rooted in workers' councils where workers can control the conditions of their job. And they surely ask the question of whether vulgar materialism is Marxism. Or whether you must not aim toward a new socialist humanism in which the basic problem is finally, once and for all, to end the alienation and fragmentation of human beings.

And all of that separates Hungarian and Polish intellectuals from the rest. The Czechs do not get into that game until about 1963. In Romania, Bulgaria, you really never get into that game. We're talking in 1956 about a revolt of intellectuals in Poland and Hungary. And they have certain forums. They have the instrument of their Writers' Unions. And the Writers' Unions in those two countries become battlegrounds. In Hungary in December of 1955, there was a memorandum that came out of the Writers' Union addressed to the government, telling Rákosi and company to keep their hands off the arts, that they were creating paralysis in the culture of Hungary. And that was the work of Tibor Déry, and Déry was a poet and novelist and a very brave man in those days. And he drew up the memorandum signed by sixty-seven intellectuals, in which he said, "Keep hands off the culture of our Hungarian society." Rákosi replied that he was a factionalist and ought to be thrown out of the Communist movement. And in Poland, in April of 1956, the anti-Stalinists writers look over the Writers' Union and ousted their Stalinist chief.

But in each of those countries is a crucial forum. And I want to mention both of those, because they tell you a lot about the excitement and the movement and the process of 1956. In Hungary it is a forum called the Petőfi Circle. And [Sándor] Petőfi, if you know your history of nineteenth-century Hungary, is your great poet and national liberator: he was a man who fought in the revolution of 1848 and '49, was killed in 1849 in the struggle for the Hungarian revolution, wrote the Hungarian national anthem "Up, Magyar" [*Nemzeti dal*], and a great national hero. And so a circle or a club is founded in his name toward the end of 1955, in general by young Communist intellectuals, but as a forum, as meeting place for the young intellectuals, whether Communists or not, to discuss the problems of Hungarian society. And those meetings in 1956 are fantastic. So on the 12th of June, before 1,600 in the audience, comes old [György] Lukács — Lukács, after all, of *History and Class Consciousness*: the one who had seen so early what the problem of reification was, what the problem of stultifying totalitarianism was, and who had

been so long under wraps and refused to speak — and came to this great meeting on the 12th of June before the Petőfi Circle to tell these young intellectuals that everything about Stalinism was a distortion of a socialist society.

Two days later, the 14th of June, a fantastic meeting, 2,000 in the audience, and they were all militants: the ones who fought in the Spanish Civil War from Hungary, the ones who had suffered repression between 1947 and '50, the ones who had gone to trial and seen their comrades killed. And they now came forth to tell the young intellectuals what it was like, why they had suffered for being veterans of the Spanish Civil War. And suddenly, at the culmination point — and in front of two members of the Hungarian Central Committee of the Communist Party, who were old Rákosi men — suddenly, at the culminating point, a woman, tall, gray hair, with all of the suffering of prison in her face, went to that rostrum. And she was Júlia Rajk, the widow of that Rajk who had been put to death in that first great trial of 1949, and Júlia Rajk herself spent five years in the prisons of Rákosi, just as she had spent seven years in the prisons of [Nazi collaborationist Miklós] Horthy. And she turned directly to those who were the Communist apparatchiks at that particular meeting, and she said to them, "You haven't killed only my husband, but you have killed the human dignity of our revolution. Where were you while those things were happening? How can you tolerate such degeneracy? How could you stand by? How can you call yourselves Communists?" And that hall rose as one human being and carried on their shoulders Júlia Rajk out in the street for manifestation.

Came that great meeting of the 27th of June of 1956 — and I want you to imagine how a society is opening up — and this was a meeting on the freedom of press. And this time there were 6,000 who pressed into a room where you could hardly breathe. And they heard a discussion of all of the journalists who had been dismissed by the newspapers by the fiat of the government. And again it is Tibor Déry, this novelist, who makes the central speech, and who demands complete freedom of the press, and who demands also that Rákosi be dismissed. And then he goes on to the essentials: "What is the relationship of socialism to the freedom of human beings? The root of our evils," says Déry, "is the absence of essential freedom. We must end the reign of the police. And I say that we will end it. We have struggled for so many things that we have forgotten the highest priority of our revolution: humanism. The free and equal relations of human beings. The end of our alienation. And how shall we Hungarians set our affairs straight — our new course, our future? It cannot be set in Moscow or in Belgrade but only here, in the heartland of our own country." And it was the right of self-determination and self-disposal that he was talking about.

That meeting began at 7:00 in the evening of the 27th of June; it ended at 5:00 in the morning of the 28th of June. And out into the street it continued, and on the next day everybody was talking about it, including Rákosi. And so he called the Central Committee together on the 30th of June.

And he said the Petőfi Circle must be silenced, and its meetings must end, and we expel Déry from the Communist Party — and we will use repression to end all of this.

And there was a storm signal in 1956 to the de-Stalinizers, the storm signal that said, "You cannot contain it; you'll have to crush it in blood." And the storm signals were the riots of Poznań. And the riots of Poznań took place on the 28th of June of 1956, in the city of Poznań in Poland. And Poznań is an industrial city. And what took place there, after all...

[*audio cuts out*]

... thousands of them in a factory called the ZISPO factory, which made locomotive parts, and consequently was important in the Polish plan. And those workers suffered from the same kind of privations that the German workers had when they revolted in June of 1953: that is, their wages were low, and throughout 1955 the amount of work that they had to do was increased. So the intensification of labor meant that they were deriving less pay for what they were doing. In addition, there was a certain unemployment because there was so few raw materials that, from time to time, these workers would go and they would find no jobs. Their conditions got worse and worse until finally, in the spring of 1956, they went — 38% of them were Communists in that work force — they went to their local Communist organization in the ZISPO factory, and they said, "We can't do anything. We will go to Warsaw, and we will demand change." And on the 25th of June, the workers in Poznań, in this factory, sent a delegation of their comrades, and there they saw [Julian] Tokarski. And Tokarski was the minister of production, a kind of an old-line Stalinist. And they said to him, "We must have better pay. We must have shorter hours. Our conditions are awful." And Tokarski said, "You will get nothing." And they said, "We will go on strike." And he said, "Then you will face tanks."

And that went back to the workers in Poznań. And they got the message on the 27th of June that nothing had happened in Warsaw, and they decided on simply an unarmed, peaceful manifestation on the 28th. And on the 28th, they went out of their factory, joined by other workers. And here you have to begin to imagine something. You have to begin to imagine that there is some dialogue from below now. And there are about 20,000 workers by noon out on the streets of the city of Poznań, and their cards and their placards call for justice, call for bread, call for real socialism, call for freedom. In other words, they're the slogans of a kind of working-class socialism that is demanded here. By noon on that day, the streets are packed with these workers, and the government calls out the force. And so by mid-afternoon, the tanks arrive, and by later in the day, the security police are there in brigade, and by nighttime, order is again restored in Poznań; 113 workers were killed, about 300 were wounded. And consequently, a riot of the first order had taken place.

And this coincided, you see — and you must understand this — this coincided with the spread of a great deal of propaganda in Poland. And that propaganda centered around a newspaper. Just as the Petőfi Circle was the forum in Hungary, so there was a newspaper that played that role in Poland. And the newspaper was called *Po prostu*. And *Po prostu*, which was founded at the end of 1955 by a young intellectual named [Eligiusz] Lasota, reached a circulation of about 200,000 by the time of the Poznań riots. And in this newspaper, there was an unsparing picture of what socialism had degenerated into in Poland: that workers were suffering, that they were getting low wages, that there were bureaucrats who were living well, who had good apartments and good automobiles and so forth. And consequently, it's in the context of this *Po prostu* propaganda that this riot takes place.

And it's more than that. And this propaganda had hit the workers of Warsaw very heavily. And you must underscore that, because if there is a difference between Poland and Hungary in 1956, it is that the workers of Poland are really involved in the movement for reform and in the movement for a certain revision of what the whole hypothesis of socialist is. And there is a factory in Warsaw called the Żerań factory. And that factory, an automobile plant, you get the very heart of a working-class radical movement — the Communist workers of that Żerań plant in Warsaw, demanding a socialist system really rooted in worker councils. All of that in the context of the Poznań uprising and riots.

And the government had to respond. And note the response. The first line of defense of [Józef] Cyrankiewicz, who is the prime minister, the first line of defense is to say that there have been provocateurs, that there has been an outside influence, that somehow there are Western imperialists who have stirred this thing up. But having said that, Cyrankiewicz went on to say, "But we must make certain reforms." You get the point. The point is that the movement for a change had become sufficiently widespread and deep in Poland, so that the government was at least partially sensitive to the need to try to make some accommodation to it. This differentiates the Polish case from the Hungarian. In Hungary, Rákosi made no such accommodation. In Poland, you have old hardliners who feel that they have to save their skin in some manner or another.

And so a struggle will really ensue in the Polish Party. And the struggle will take place at what is called the 7th Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Polish Communist Party, which is held between the 18th and the 20th of July of 1956. And at that Plenary session in mid-July, there is a struggle between the old-line Stalinists who look at Poznań, who look at *Po prostu*, who look at this reform movement, and say we've got to crush it — in other words, we have really got to purge the Party, we've got to suppress all of this kind of agitation for reform. And then there are the others. There are those who say, "Look, we must co-opt this movement. We must begin to give certain kinds of reforms." And the reformers win out at the plenary session in July of 1956, and certain kinds of changes rather slowly begin to take place. You begin to get

changes in the administration of the security police; you begin to get a co-optation into the Central Committee of certain Communists who want to raise the wages of workers; you begin, slowly, to try to accommodate. But what that Central Committee needs, what the Polish Party needs if it really is to co-opt this movement, is Gomułka. Without him they cannot do it.

And all of that is preface to the topic. All of that is preface to October of 1956. Oh, long preface. And it's Poland in October of '56, and it's Hungary in October of '56. And it is that blinding flash. And it is the moment when you see something else, and when that space may be turned into something else. And what it is in Poland is a great drama that centers, really, around the accession of Władysław Gomułka to the first position in the Polish Communist Party. And that is excessively dramatic. Here is a man who had been ousted in 1948, who had been in prison between 1950 and '56, who had not been reintegrated into the Polish Communist Party until the 4th of August of 1956. And it is hellishly dramatic that suddenly, after all, on the 20th of October, he is going to be named the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Poland. But it is equally ambiguous, because the question is: Whose man is Gomułka? And the question is: Whom will he serve? And to what end? Will he serve a revolution within a revolution, or will he canalize it and co-opt it? And if he canalizes and co-opts it, will anything be gained or will we simply have posed the question?

And the ambiguity arises because he is the man of two groups that are at odds with each other. He is the man of the mass. He is the man of the popular movement. But he is also the man of the "apparatus," the man of the apparatus of the Party. And the popular movement looks at Gomułka, and the workers and the students in the university, and the young and all of those people who really are talking about worker councils and want a different kind of socialism — they know they are more radical. They know that they really have exceeded him in their vision. All of those people who, as it was said, simply couldn't sleep on that night of the 19th and 20th of October, when all of Warsaw was awake, all of those people who were dreaming of something else knew that Gomułka really wasn't their man. But they looked at him, first of all, as nationalists, as somebody who could end the Russian, excessive influence in Poland. They looked at him, secondly, as somebody who was more democratic, who really wanted to end some of the worst abuses in the Party. But most of all, they looked at him as a transition — as somebody to get rid of the Stalinists in the Party, somebody who could get rid of the worst excesses in the Party and give a period of maneuverability, a period of transition. And, in fact, Gomułka did that. And for a couple of years in Poland after 1956, it was freer than in any East European country. And there was a certain freedom of the press and a certain freedom of meeting. There was a certain kind of maneuverability.

But the problem is that Gomułka is also the man of the Party. He is a Party man by his whole tradition. And the Central Committee, these "hards" who are getting softer because they have to save their skins, they look over at Gomułka and they say, "Only he can save us. He bargains

hard. He wants certain conditions, but he will canalize this revolution." And you see what question that raises.

It raises a long historic question. It raises the question of whether one can really have a valid and a veritable opposition within a Communist Party — or whether, ultimately, the very structure of a Communist Party doesn't suck in the opposition and consequently neutralize it. It raises the question of, if Gomułka really were aiming for some other kind of Communist order, he should not have gone outside the Party. But that, you see, raises so many problems. And every Communist has had to face that particular question. For Gomułka it wasn't much of a question. He would never have gone outside the Party. And that's really where it lay.

And so we say that the whole Polish revolution turns around that ambiguity. And it goes something like this: it is the mass that really acts up in August and September and the beginning of October of 1956. The 7th Plenum, as I said, in July of 1956, had made certain reforms, but that didn't really satisfy the mass. And you begin to have agitation in the university when the students come back in September. And, in the Żerań auto plant, there you get all kinds of demands for worker councils. And they actually establish a worker council in September. In other words, the problem, really, of containing this revolution becomes very pressing. And so the Central Committee reintegrates Gomułka into the Party on the 4th of August of 1956, and then they begin to negotiate with him: What does he want in order to take a key position in the Party? And he says, "I will not just be co-opted. I make certain real demands."

It's not just a question of ousting certain Stalinists like Hilary Minc, for example, who is an old hardliner, but it is a question of getting rid of Rokossovsky — in other words, of getting rid of the Russian agent General [Konstantin] Rokossovsky, who is the minister of defense whom Stalin had imposed upon Poland — of getting rid of the Russian influence inside Poland. And finally, on the 13th of October of 1956, in a meeting of the Politburo (of the Political Bureau of the Polish Communist Party), it is voted that Gomułka should become a member of the Politburo, and in fact become the First Secretary of the Party. But that has to be approved by the Central Committee. And the Central Committee will meet — note the date — on the 19th of October of 1956. And something fantastic is happening. The Party is capitulating to Gomułka in order to prevent a complete disintegration of the system. Comes the 19th of October. And by that time, the "hards," the Stalinists, have really tried to make their plans. They have thought, for example, about the arrest of these certain leaders of the reform movement. And that doesn't work. They thought about moving the Polish army, and that doesn't work. The only thing that the Stalinist interest has going for it is the possibility that the Soviet Union may intervene. And so you have the Central Committee meeting on the morning of the 19th of October of 1956.

And it goes smoothly. And at the beginning, Gomułka and three of his friends are voted into the Central Committee. Then comes the proposition that Gomułka should become the First Secretary

of the Communist Party to replace Ochab. And then comes the word. And the word is that, at the military airport in Warsaw, there is suddenly a Soviet delegation — Khrushchev, [Anastas] Mikoyan, [Vyacheslav] Molotov, [Lazar] Kaganovich, and Marshal [Ivan] Konev — a delegation to attend the Central Committee meeting.

And the Central Committee decides it can no longer debate, that it must talk first to the Russians. And the word gets out in the city of Warsaw, and it spreads throughout Poland, that the Russians have arrived. And that means that they're going to impose their will, does it not? What do the Russians want? And with Khrushchev it's perfectly evident. He didn't want, really, to use force in Poland if he could help it. He had to come to find out what Gomułka was about and what he was proposing. And, certainly, to use force, to send the Soviet army in, meant, after all, to get on the wrong side of Tito again — it meant to get on the wrong side of the Chinese — but was willing to do it if there was more to be lost by Gomułka. If the Poles, if they broke away from the Soviet model of communism, if they gave some other model to Eastern Europe, they could be very dangerous.

And the discussion went on, if you can call them that. And it would have been something for all of us to have heard those discussions. Because there was a full day of bitterness and of acrimony that was fantastic.

And all over Poland, you see, and, especially in the city of Warsaw, Gomułka could count on the people. Because you had certain bases or foci of support that are terrific. You had the university, *Po prostu*, the factories, people on the street; there really is mass support. And the messages begin pouring in. The messages are to the Central Committee and to Gomułka to hold fast against the Russians. And consequently, you begin to get messages of this kind that are read to the Russians. This is from the Communist section of the workers at the Żerań factory: "We affirm with force that we are wed to the power of the people. And we repudiate anyone who says that, in our struggle for socialist humanism, we are moving toward bourgeois democracy." And then Oskar Lange, that great economist, gets up in the presence of the Russians and says this — and note it well because this is really what the whole story is about — and Lange says to the Russians, "Look, the working class and all the laboring people want to govern their own lives. Russian comrades, when we look at the gigantic outburst of our political participation and enthusiasm, the endless meetings, the views of the working class being expressed, we can say that, for the first time now, is the dictatorship of the proletariat."

You see what Lange is saying. What he's saying is what you really are sensitive to every time we see it. If you see it in May [1968] in Paris, if you see it in the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia in 1968, whenever people are finally unfrozen, whenever the thaw comes, there really is dictatorship of the proletariat. And that is what Lange said directly.

Well, Khrushchev, after all, was realistic. And he asked Gomulka two questions. He asked him, first of all: How do you view the role of the Party? And Gomulka says, "I believe that the dictatorship of the proletariat means, fundamentally, the dictatorship of the Party." In other words, that he would preserve the Party. He was asked next: Where do you stand on the Warsaw Pact? He said, "I am absolutely loyal to it." And after this long, horrendous day of debate, the Russians left — and do nothing.

And the next day, the 20th of October, Gomulka becomes, really, the boss of the Communist Party and the key figure in Poland. And when he does, he makes a great speech in which he says, after all, that satellitism and Stalinism are dead in Poland: "What is invaluable in any system worthy of being called socialist is the suppression of the exploitation of man by man. And there are many paths to that goal." But having said that, Gomulka then goes on to say: "We will not permit anyone to exploit this process of democratization in order to destroy socialism. At the top, leading the changes, must always be the Communist Party of Poland." Now, that's a very different position, you see, than some of the *Po prostu* writers were taking. You take Roman Zimand, for example, in *Po prostu* January of 1957, saying, "If the entire Party was Stalinist, and if we are fighting against Stalinism, isn't it necessary to liquidate the Party — that is, to start all over and build another kind of Communist Party in Poland?" When Zimand said that, he was only six months away from being stripped of his Communist Party membership and put into prison.

The point is that the Russians used Gomulkaism, and the Party used Gomulka, as a tampon: as a way of stopping, after all, some kind of ultimate flow that really would be dangerous, as some kind of safeguard against anything that was worse. And what happened, of course, was that the revolution was not a profound revolution in Poland. Because if you then take or examine that Gomulka regime for the two or three years that followed, there are changes that come about. And note this well, really. There are changes that come about: there is, after all, an end to some of the worst Stalinist tactics, some of the worst Stalinist personalities in the Central Committee; there is a certain restraint on police tactics; there is even putting into effect a so-called new economic plan of Oskar Lange in which a certain decentralization — even workers councils — were integrated. All of that went on for two or three years in Poland. And then it broke down.

By 1960, after all, Gomulka already shows again authoritarian tactics and techniques. Some of the people around him are showing the same kind of practices. Lange's plan is shelved, and you have again a centralized economic plan. And what Poland becomes is tranquil or apathetic or the whole political system, after all, that had been challenged, really is in place and reasonably well established. Ultimately, Poland did not have a good economy. It had an unfavorable balance of trade; it did not raise its workers' wages. Ultimately, after all of this struggle and after a certain small area of freedom, the workers and the mass simply slip back.

And there's something worse than that. Who thrived, then? Who are the victors of this Polish revolt? What happens in this space? Obviously, the peasantry a victor because collectivization of agriculture is stopped. And Poland becomes the one country in Eastern Europe that really goes back to private farmsteads. The 10,000 collectives of 1956 are reduced to 1,600. It means, in the second place, that the economic plan again becomes a centralized plan. And the workers' councils are disbanded; you have so-called workers' conferences that don't mean anything. And what is worst of all is that the Church is reestablished, really, as a central entity in the ideological life of the country — Cardinal [Stefan] Wyszyński, released from prison on the 28th of October of 1956, and the Catholic Church goes back into business. By 1960, there was an inquiry among young Poles, and 78% said that they were profoundly attached to the Catholic Church. And it is my judgment that that is a defeat for the revolution.

And so there were young Communists — like [Jacek] Kuroń, for example, and Karol Modzelewski — who really got into trouble with the Party in 1964, and got jailed because they said, you see, that it was all wrong. And in their open letter circulated around Poland, they said, you see, "The revolution we could have fought in 1956, the revolution we should have fought, was the revolution against the bureaucratic model of socialism. And if we did not do that, if we simply de-Stalinized by kicking out certain personalities and putting in others, then we would fall back into the same trap." And so poor Kuroń and Modzelewski said, "No socialism unless it is based on the power of the people, unless it is based on the worker council." And so the Polish revolution ends in cooptation — ultimately, in defeat.

Hungary: Rákosi, the summer of 1956. Tough, tough as hell — suppressing the Petőfi Circle, ousting Déry from the Communist Party, prepared to put Nagy in prison, prepared to crush the whole movement. And the Russians think he's going too far. And Mikoyan comes to Hungary, to Budapest, on the 17th of July. And he says, "You're going too far. You are out of touch with the people," and consequently demands that Rákosi resign. And he does on the 18th of July of 1956. But then the Russians, with this notion of a very careful and a very staged de-Stalinization, really plan the next Political Bureau of the Hungarian Party, the next Central Committee. And so you get him replaced, Rákosi, by a man named Ernő Gerő. And Gerő is an old Stalinist, only a little bit more flexible than Rákosi. And you get again at the position of Culture a man like [József] Révai, who is an ardent Stalinist and who puts his heavy hand over the culture of Hungary. The concession is János Kádár. And Kádár becomes the assistant head of the Assistant General Secretary of the Party. And he's supposed to be a reformer, he's supposed to be a liberal.

You see the point. The point is that there was no capacity in the Hungarian Party to make the concessions that the Polish Party made. There was no sensitivity to how far you had to go in order to co-opt. And consequently, you had to go in order to co-opt. And consequently, you will get the tremendous explosion that you get in the fall of 1956.

What happens was that Nagy could not play the roles of Gomulka. He had no bases of support, like the worker support that Gomulka had or the support in *Po prostu* or the support in the university. He had only a very vague, generalized support among intellectuals in the Party — almost nothing. He couldn't push his way in. And Nagy was the kind of guy who would not make a popular uprising from the outside, who said in a letter to the Central Committee of the Hungarian Party on the 4th of October: "I remain a man of unity, a very loyal man." And so everything was to explode in chaos.

Look: the 6th of October of 1956, and the government decides to rehabilitate Rajk and to have a public funeral for Rajk, and to have a public funeral for Rajk, years after his death. And so this public funeral of the 6th of October brings out, in the city of Budapest, 300,000 demonstrators, with Nagy and with Júlia Rajk at the head of that manifestation. And then, by the 22nd of October — under the impetus of what happened in Poland on the 19th and 20th, and the success of Gomulka — in the Petöffi Circle, there is a ten-point program. The demand is, really, that Nagy be brought to power, that he be named the head of the Communist Party of Hungary. And in the University of Budapest, there is a demand for a great manifestation on the 23rd of October in solidarity with the Polish events. And the government bans that manifestation.

One hundred thousand people appear on the street on the morning of the 23rd of October. By noon, the government has revoked its denial and said that the manifestation, which has already taken place, is legal. By that time the streets thronged, and the people looked for things to do. And that's the crisis. There is no real preparation. There is no real training. They seize the radio station. Then they suddenly see that huge, monstrous statue of Stalin in the central square. And down that goes. And then they move around and cry for Nagy to come to power.

And, finally, on the night of the 23rd of October the Central Committee of the Hungarian Party, meeting in emergency, names Nagy as the prime minister of the country. The 24th of October, Nagy was a trapped man — trapped between the imminence of Russian intervention if this revolution gets out of hand. And a mass revolution gets out of hand, and a mass that has to be satisfied. And so, on the 24th, he calls for order. And order doesn't come. And there are all kinds of persons and all kinds of influences. I don't want you to underestimate the complexity of this. It isn't only revolution; it's counter-revolution. People have come out of the walls. There are the old Horthyites; there are ones that want the Western alliance — there's a strange *mélange* on the streets of Budapest at this particular point. And on the 24th, he calls for a limited intervention by the Soviet army, just to keep order in the city of Budapest, just one day. And order is restored.

The next day, the 25th of October, Gerő is ousted as the First Secretary of the Communist Party and Kádár is in. And so Nagy is the prime minister, Kádár is the head of the Party; the liberals, presumably, have won out. The very next day, the 26th of October, a Colonel [Pál] Maléter, the head of the tank division of the Hungarian army, goes over to this revolution. But the crowd, the

mass, it has no leadership. And it moves in various directions, and it makes its demands. It demands multi-parties. And Nagy agrees that parties will be restored: the Socialist Party, any Party that stands for socialism, can now become legal. And there will be a coalition government. And then the demand comes for a neutralization — in other words, for getting out of the Warsaw Pact. And on the 3rd of November, Nagy agrees to that. And that is too much. And on the 4th of November, Nagy is in prison. And Kádár takes over as both premier and First Secretary of the Party. And the Russian tanks, and the Russian intervention, are in Hungary.

And the whole question is: Was it a veritable revolution? Or is it true, as the Russians and Kádár and his people have always said, that really there was counter-revolution on the streets of Budapest? And I say that that really is nonsense. To be sure, there were those...

[audio cuts out]

... that the workers wanted another kind of socialism, a decentralized kind of socialism, then, really, it is a conundrum to say that the Russians were smashing counter-revolution.

So you see the point. You have two great clashes, two great uprisings, in '56. One of them is co-opted; the other is crushed. And it still raises the question: Is there any hope in that socialist space? What is it that happens in the process, in the very evolution of those societies, that make for some potentiality of something else? And there are two insights that we really have to plow to summarize that whole thing. One is what Tito tried to do, and the other is what the Czechs tried to do. And we'll try to summarize that next time. *[applause]*