

IT HAPPENED IN POLAND

Catholics and Socialists Unite for Heaven on Earth

By GORDON CRUIKSHANK

WARSAW.

A SOMEWHAT superficial question which has been posed particularly since Poland's general election is: "Who really rules Poland, Gomulka or Cardinal Wyszynski?"

Or, more accurately, which is the greater force in Poland, the United Workers' Party or the Catholic Church?

Friends of Poland's socialism express concern at what appears to be the great influence of the Church.

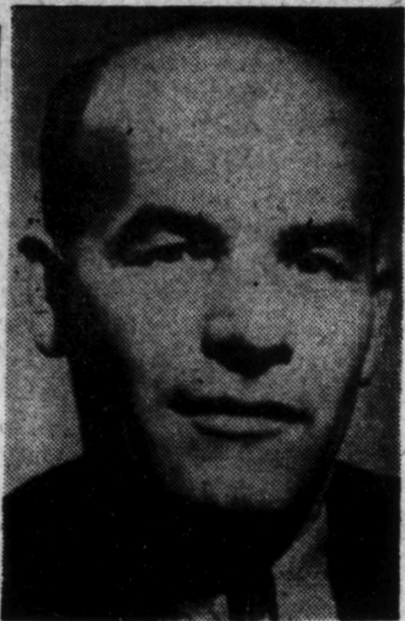
It is fairly obvious that there would not have been anything like the same degree of national unanimity in the general election had not the Episcopate called on the people to vote.

The return to religious instruction in all schools, with the state paying for textbooks and teachers, is, again, not at all what is expected by socialists of a socialist country.

They do not want intolerance, or suppression, but why active instruction in the schools? Why not leave religion strictly to the conscience of the individual and the Church? Why give it state backing?

And then perhaps it has been noted that a Secular Schools Society has been founded in Warsaw, and an Atheist League. Paradoxically, we see socialists in a socialist country demanding from a socialist government, the leaders of which are of an avowed materialist outlook, that their children be protected from theological influences at school.

Probably nine out of ten Polish people are members of the Catholic Church. A large number, probably a majority, of United Workers' Party members are Catholics; in the countryside the



WLADYSLAW GOMULKA

Church has great authority.

The policy and mistaken practice of the Polish government over the past 12 years tended to drive people to the Church. Attempts to impose a socialist outlook merely created and hardened a resistance to it, and partly discredited it.

Those are the bones of the reality of religious belief in Poland. The flesh and blood can be seen in the crowds that pack every church every Sunday.

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THOSE are the realities the Polish socialist government faced when several months ago it formulated, together with the Catholic leadership, new regulations providing for among other things the return to religious instruction in the schools and greater practical freedom for the Church to make its own appointments.

But what about the other side of the coin?

First the majority of Polish peo-

ple have taken and accepted the socialist road as the only way to achieve the aim which unites the whole nation, the raising of living standards.

The workers who demonstrated in Poznan—and the hooligan excesses were not part of that demonstration—expressed the general wish of the working people to improve socialist efficiency, but not to destroy socialism. They had rejected capitalism for ever long before.

In the countryside anyone, including the local priest, who tried preaching a return to the brutalizing poverty of the past would not get far with the peasants.

The mass of intellectuals, too, see themselves as ideological "improvers of socialism."

Then again, as Gomulka has pointed out, the party building socialism is "in power" in Poland. And it intends to hold that power because "even the worst People's Government is better than any other."

From such opposing realities derives the special policy toward religion adopted by the government. It is not, as some people think, a policy of compromise, nor is it a policy of uneasy, or even easy, coexistence between two groupings of people within one country.

It is rather a policy of integration. The Church must be incorporated within the socialist political and economic system. It must be afforded the fullest rights to function within its proper religious bounds.

Nobody just "thought up" such a situation as exists in Poland, where a largely religious people with a highly developed religious organizational structure has adopted socialism.

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OF COURSE, the Polish Socialists and Communists would like



Young Polish women. Nine out of ten are Catholics who have accepted the socialist road toward improving their daily lives.

the mass of the people to adopt a materialist outlook without reservations. Of course, they hope that will happen some day. Undoubtedly they will in every way possibly assist toward that end.

Gomulka has pointed out, for example, that where a sufficient body of people agitate for lay schools for children, they shall have them. Already a dozen of such schools are now open in Warsaw because of parental pressure.

Undoubtedly many publications and other means will be developed by the government and the party to explain the workings of the universe in a scientific way, particularly to Polish youth.

But clearly the masses of Polish people will more easily be free of medieval ideas when they have freed themselves of the present difficult, and to some baffling, economic problems. When they have rid themselves of the daily penance and frustrations of low living standards:

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A LEADING Communist formulated the basic approach of the government and party thus: "The

unity of the people for heaven on earth is more important than unity after death."

The group of Catholic deputies in the Sejm must be aware of the truth of that statement. Likewise the editors of Catholic publications. All of them support the economic aims of the government.

They know that less than a dozen years ago Poland's economy was the devastated shambles of what was, before the war, a backward economy. They know that today Poland turns out more than five million tons of steel a year, builds ocean-going vessels, makes motor cars, machine tools, radio and television sets, and a thousand and one other new products.

The appeal of Gomulka, the mobilizing force of the program of economic, political and social advance outlined at the eighth Plenum of the United Workers' Party is rooted precisely in that they offer the achievements of the kind of life the Polish people want, regardless as to whether they are Catholics, Communists, simple-lifers or sun-worshippers.