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**A SEMBLANCE OF A REVOLUTION**

Osrodek **Karta**

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## A Semblance of a Revolution

A breakthrough took place between February and November 1956 in the very centre of Soviet-dominated Central Europe. This breakthrough is commonly referred to as the *thaw*. This term, however, does not reflect the process to which the subjugated countries of this region were subjected. Although the impetus came from outside, in the final measure, its effectiveness was ruled by subservience to the Kremlin. Thus, the aptness of this metaphor, based on the seasons of the year, is limited – spring most certainly did not follow on from the preceding cold of winter. Indeed, what purpose did the short thaw serve, given that the winter which followed was a long one, albeit not quite as cold?

In 1956, the four Communist states in the region – Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany – provided a setting for an extraordinary experiment. During the course of ten months, these societies underwent a test of revolutionary readiness – following the East Berlin riots of 1953, an anti-Soviet upheaval could have erupted in any of these four states. First, the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party branded Stalin a criminal, recognising the “cult of the individual” as a perversion of the system, Party officials then tested the ground, watching for the reaction of the leaders and the societies of vassal states and, where necessary, eliminating any threats.

Could a universal revolution have broken out throughout these four countries? Judging by the preventive actions taken by the Soviets, this was quite probable. The events of Poznań in June 1956 and Budapest in the autumn of 1956, or of Prague a decade later, demonstrate that rebellion could have flared up in any area of the western part of the Soviet bloc. The Kremlin authorities counteracted rebellion, defusing each ignition point separately. Three years after Stalin’s death, any revolution could easily slip out of control; denunciation of Stalin for all aspects of “Stalinist evil” relieved the imperialist Party of any blame and, at the same time, enabled the pre-empting of any potential massed action by the subjugated peoples.

We now present the most crucial events which took place in this part of Europe in 1956 and substantiate them with selected source material relating to each of the four countries. An international team of researchers has concentrated on selection of typical tes-



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timonials to the stance taken by local state authorities, as well as that of the more active representatives of society, as a reaction to the activities of the Soviets, or their followers. The resultant picture aims to answer the basic question: what did happen here during a year which passed into history as a breakthrough but the finale of which in no way resembled a universal political thaw?

Revolutionary unrest was present throughout but an international revolution – the only measure which could actually bring about a geopolitical breakthrough – never broke out. The rebellion in Poznań was immediately quelled. The Hungarian Uprising was not supported – even by the previously rebellious Poland. The determination of the Soviets and their protégés (both in People’s Poland and in Hungary) was so strong that it eclipsed any public protests. More than three decades would pass before we united in solidarity and demanded our freedom.

Zbigniew Gluza

Budapest,  
October 1956.  
Tanks – most  
probably outside  
the parliament  
building.



Moscow,  
14 February 1956.  
Nikita Khrush-  
chev speaks  
during the 20th  
Congress of the  
Communist Party  
of the Soviet  
Union.

25 February

**USSR.** During a closed sitting on the final day of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet Russia and without the presence of foreign guests, Nikita Khrushchev – the First Secretary of the Central Committee – presents a paper entitled *On the Cult of the Individual and its Consequences*. The paper charges Joseph Stalin with specific crimes, although the list is limited mainly to those crimes committed against Communists and leaders of the Red Army during the Great Terror (1937–38). As such, it is also an attempt to contrast the ‘good’ system with the ‘bad’ dictator and the negative aspects of his character.

#### Nikita Khrushchev:

*We must consider the matter with all seriousness and analyse it carefully, to eradicate any possibility of any form of repetition of what happened during Stalin's lifetime, [...] when he resorted to brute force not just against everything which opposed him but which, given his capricious and despotic nature, was at variance with his ideas. [...] It was Stalin who introduced the concept of “an enemy of the people”. That description alone was an excuse to forego the necessity of proving the ideological mistakes of the person, or persons who were party to the debate and, against all norms of revolutionary rule of law, it enabled the use of the cruellest repressions against anyone who disagreed with Stalin [...].*

*From a Marxist-Leninist point of view, it will take a great deal of hard work to carry out a critical assessment and to correct the widely held mistaken attitudes towards the cult of the individual in the fields of history, philosophy, economics and other sciences, as well as literature and art.*

Moscow, 25 February

→ *The cult of the individual and its consequences: paper given by Comrade Nikita S. Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Paris 1956.*

#### Edward Ochab, member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:

*It was like a hammer blow. Of course, we were already aware of various transgressions and crimes but not of their extent and not that they were so heinous. Khrushchev's speech came as a blow which required an immediate decision: do we support the direction of the resolutions*

*of the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party or should we maintain a stony silence, i.e. make no mention of the crimes committed by Beria and Stalin. Of course, a high price had to be paid for such revelations in the Soviet Union, and possibly an even greater one in Poland. This gave rise to the question – does our leadership have the right to maintain silence, or should it breach the muddy waters as quickly as possible, tell the bitter truth and not lose hope of reaching clear waters.*

Warsaw

→ Teresa Torańska, *Oni [They]*, Warsaw 2004.

Berlin, 1956.  
Border control point. Notice reads: "Halt! You are entering the American Sector".



WŁADYSŁAW ŚLAWNY / FORUM

### Extract from STASI [GDR State Security] reports:

*The following discussions are typical of the views voiced by a considerable number of officials at local and central levels:*

– Officials of the General Post Office in Jena discussed the topic: “Is it right to destroy books and portraits of Stalin?” [...]

– Students declare: “Germans must consider the consequences of the speech given by Comrade [Anastas] Mikoyan [member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party], because Walter Ulbricht [Secretary General of the SED – German Socialist Unity Party] was Stalin’s best friend.”

– Opinions voiced in the Industrial Construction Design Office in Berlin that “Stalin was murdered at the 20th Congress” are typical of the attitude of the intelligentsia.

**Berlin, 28 February**

- *Die DDR im Blick der Stasi 1956. Die geheimen Berichte an die DDR Führung [The German Democratic Republic in the eyes of the Stasi 1956. Secret reports for the GDR authorities]*, ed. Henrik Bispinck, Göttingen 2016.

### Mátyás Rákosi, First Secretary of the Hungarian Working Peoples’ Party (MDP) in conversation with Yuri Andropov, USSR Ambassador to Hungary:

*You cannot carry on like this. [...] You should not have been in such a hurry. What happened at your Congress was a catastrophe. I dread to think what the consequences may be – either in your country or in mine.*

**Moscow**

- John P.C. Matthews, *Explosion. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956*, New York 2007.

### Milan Ferko, Czechoslovak writer and lawyer:

*We were all convinced that we were building a new and better world for all peoples. Therefore, the text of Khrushchev’s secret speech at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party came as a shock to us – news of Stalin’s repressions, the gulag labour camps and the criminal activities which – based on the same model – were also used in our country and in other countries of the “socialist bloc”. At that time, however, we still had no experience and our reactions lacked direction, the future was still our aim.*

**Bratislava**

- Milan Ferko, *Ten búrlivý rok [That stormy year]*, in: *Pyžamová revolúcia [A pyjama revolution]*, ed. Anton Blaha et al, Bratislava 2007.



ERICH LESSING / MAGNUM PHOTOS / PHOTO POWER

Czechoslovakia, 1956. Man reading “Pravda” – the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

### 3 March

**Poland.** Bolesław Bierut, 1st Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party is ill and continues his stay in Moscow. During his absence from Warsaw, a meeting of Party activists takes place under the chairmanship of Aleksander Zawadzki, member of the Central Committee Politburo and Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Many of the activists demand that those in the State Security services responsible for "breaking the law" be punished and that the "Gomułka question" (the circumstances surrounding the removal of Gomułka from office and the arrest of the former Secretary General of the Party) be clarified.

#### Stefan Wierbłowski, member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers Party, during talks:

*I have the feeling, and am probably not alone in this, that a violent storm has ripped out a window together with its frame, letting fresh air into a room which has not been aired for many years. [...] I think and truly believe that the 20th Congress will be a sharp shove towards a return to, and application of, Leninist standards in the life of the Party and the economy, a shove in the direction of the democratisation of the whole of public life. [...].*

Warsaw, 3 March

- Dokumenty centralnych władz Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej marzec–listopad '56 [Documents of the central authorities of the Polish United Workers' Party, March – November 1956], selection and editing: Marek Jabłonowski et al, Warsaw 2009.

#### Extract from: *Wnioski z narady centralnego aktywu partyjnego* [Outcomes of talks among central party activists]:

*The main cause of our ideological and cultural problems lies in the Party's delay in applying a deep and fundamental criticism of the dogmatism and other negative factors of the bygone era. Silence on our part speeds the growth of simultaneous criticism, albeit not always fair, by people in all walks of life – frequently not even associated with the Party. [...] As a result, we fail to satisfy intellectual needs and we lose our authority; furthermore, we are faced with the danger that the prerogative for levelling criticism [...] may be seized by someone else.*

Warsaw, 4 March

- Dokumenty centralnych władz Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej marzec–listopad '56 [Documents of the central authorities of the Polish United Workers' Party, March – November 1956], selection and editing: Marek Jabłonowski et al, Warsaw 2009.

#### Jerzy Zawieyski, writer:

*Today marks the third anniversary of Stalin's death. Yet there is no mention in any newspaper. And what happened three years ago! Floods of tributes, eulogies, hymns of praise. [...] And today? The slaves, the Party minions are silent.*

Warsaw, 5 March

- Jerzy Zawieyski, *Dzienniki* [Diaries], vol. 1, Warsaw 2011.

### 10 March

**Poland.** An article with the same title as Nikita Khrushchev's paper appears in the "Trybuna Ludu" newspaper.

#### Extract from an editorial: *O kulcie jednostki i jego następstwach* [The cult of the individual and its consequences]:

*Our Party is undergoing an enormous process of re-education. This process is difficult for all of us. We must start re-education with ourselves, with a deep analysis of our own habits, our own methods of work, our own ways of thinking.*

Warsaw, 10 March

- "Trybuna Ludu" Issue 69, 10 March 1956.



MUZELUM WOJSKA POLSKIEGO (POLISH ARMY MUSEUM) / EAST NEWS

Propaganda poster: "Onto new victories under the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR)".

### Mieczysław Jastrun, poet, translator:

*The 20th Congress is top news. [...] Today, for the first time, the press expresses a negative assessment of Stalin's latter activities. For the first time, I write his surname with no feeling of dread.*

Obory, 10 March

→ Mieczysław Jastrun, *Dziennik 1955–1981 [Diary 1955–1981]*, Kraków 2002.

### 11 March

**Poland.** An article written by Jerzy Ambroziewicz, Jan Olszewski and Walery Namiotkiewicz appears in the weekly journal "Po Prostu". It is entitled "Reaching out to the people of the AK Underground Resistance Army". In the article, the authors demand justice for the soldiers of the AK Resistance Army. The text of the article meets with enormous public response and gives rise to the opinion that the weekly is the main mouthpiece of the young intellectual supporters of democratisation of the system.

**Extract from an article entitled *Na spotkanie ludziom z AK [Reaching out to former members of the AK Underground Resistance Army]: At the end of the German occupation, the soldiers of the AK resistance army were not greeted with [...] a triumphal march. [...] They were met with placards bearing the words: "The AK – the malignant dwarf of reactionism", while later the condescending smile of a half-hearted idealist moron would imply: "Although you belonged to the AK, we will let you live and work and give you a chance to redeem yourselves." [...]***

*What effect did this have? Some of those undoubtedly praiseworthy young people took up a completely negative stance towards our new reality. [...] Others, realising the futility of such an attitude, [...] tried to overcome opposition and prejudice and to take an active part in life in the new order. Our chosen path proved difficult and full of obstacles for them and they rarely met with a helping hand. [...] It is time to give those heroes the position they rightfully deserve.*

Warsaw, 11 March

→ "Po Prostu" Issue 11, 1956.

### 12 March

**USSR.** Bolesław Bierut, to the end of his days a firm supporter of Stalin's hard line, dies in Moscow. Although his death was due to natural



Warsaw, 1956.  
Anna Bratkowska, Deputy Editor-in-Chief, with Ryszard Turcki in the editorial office of the weekly "Po Prostu".

causes, rumours abound in Poland that he had been poisoned by the Soviets.

### Jan Józef Szczepański, writer:

*A typical reaction on the part of the public: some dismissive half-smiles but, on the whole, total indifference. He was too distant a figure to even generate hate. [...] This event, more than any other, clearly shows that there were no emotional ties here. That it had nothing to do with us. The death of a functionary. Frugal bows, black mourning ribbons on flagpoles, some profound quotes like "The great son of nations" and the histrionic broken voices of radio presenters. Poor man. Such is the measure of revolutionary grandeur.*

Kraków, 13 March

→ Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945–1956 [Diary, 1945–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 2009.

### 16 March

**Poland.** The funeral of Bolesław Bierut takes place in Warsaw and is attended, among others, by Nikita Khrushchev.



DN. 12 MARCA 1956 R. -  
ZMARŁ I SEKRETARZ KC. PZP  
BOLESŁAW BIERUT

Warsaw,  
13 March 1956.  
Obituary of  
Bolesław Bierut  
in a bookshop  
window.



**Andrzej Kijowski, literary critic and essayist:**

*The streets of Warsaw honoured Bierut as a national hero. The masses need a hero. They hailed Bierut a hero because he died in Moscow, in defiance of the cult of Stalin, in defiance of the overthrow of Stalin, despite the reserve with which the ceremonies commenced – indeed, in defiance of the generally expected reserve. The funeral took place with full military pomp. The masses were elated.*

Warsaw, 20 March

→ Andrzej Kijowski, *Dziennik 1955–1969 [Diary 1955–1969]*, Kraków 1998.

**20 March**

**Poland.** 6th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. Edward Ochab becomes the new 1st Secretary. A conflict ensues between two factions – the 'Puławy' faction – considered to be in favour of liberalisation and the dogmatic 'Natolin' faction.

**Extract from Nikita Khrushchev's speech at the 6th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:**

*Having presented this paper [at the 20th Congress], we now reveal it to party members and then we propose to present it to young Komsomol members. That means 18 million young people [...]; we planned to present the paper at workers' meetings – not just to members of the Party but to non-Party members, so that they would feel that we trust them,*

*too. [...] I believe we will receive the support of the workers, and of both office workers and intellectuals. Our enemies are quietly rejoicing now but I think they will soon be very disappointed. Comrades, in view of this paper, I am entirely convinced of this. Indeed, I will go so far as to say that it will bring incredible unification in the ranks of our Party, and a unification of the nation with the Party.*

Warsaw, 20 March

→ *Dokumenty centralnych władz Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej marzec–listopad '56*, wyb. i oprac. Marek Jabłonowski i inni. [Documents of the central authorities of the Polish United Workers' Party, March – November 1956], selection and editing: Marek Jabłonowski et al, Warsaw 2009.

**Jan Józef Szczepański:**

*Everyone is greatly excited by "Khrushchev's secret report" [...]. Why is it now, at this moment, that Stalin's actions turn out to be crimes, and why is it that it is Khrushchev who is exposing them? [...]? Candour as a card played in a political game cannot have much in common with truth. And what are the odds in this game, given that it is worth the risk of undermining prestige? We have never seen psychological ploys on such a scale. In any case, this about-turn must surely be followed by an attempt at a completely new direction. Towards prosperity? Or the unification of Germany? [...] Or perhaps just shuffling faces around?*

Kraków, 20 March

→ Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945–1956 [Diary 1945–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 2009.



Warsaw,  
16 March 1956.  
Bolesław Bierut's  
funeral cortège.

USSR, the 1950s.  
News being  
read to peasant  
workers in an  
agricultural  
cooperative.

**Poland.** The leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party decides to translate Khrushchev's speech into Polish and to distribute it to Party organisations throughout the country. Over the next weeks, the paper is read out at meetings, arousing considerable emotion, unusually heated discussion and numerous questions. The text of the speech is also released to the public.

**Stefan Staszewski, First Secretary of the Warsaw Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:**

*A few days after the plenum, the Soviet Union sent us the full text of Khrushchev's paper [...]. Khrushchev's speech was laid out for reading in one of the upstairs chambers of the Central Committee. [...] A few days later there came a call for a translation because many people – members of the Central Committee – did not know Russian. Ochab gave his permission.*

*After some wavering, I agreed with a couple of members of the Executive that the paper was an important document of which everyone should be aware. We made an official declaration that we would publish it in a run of 3,000 numbered copies; unofficially, we ordered the printers to produce a run of 15,000 copies with repeated numbering; the printers took it on themselves to make further copies and thus the seal of silence surrounding Khrushchev's speech was broken. I, personally, presented copies which were hot off the press to Philippe Ben – Warsaw correspondent of 'Le Monde', to Gruson of the 'Herald Tribune' and Flora Lewis of 'The New York Times' – three friendly foreign correspondents – and they immediately telexed them to the West.*

Warsaw

→ Teresa Torafńska, *Oni [They]*, Warsaw 2004.

**End of March**

**Hungary.** Release of information concerning Khrushchev's speech gives rise to voices of criticism in Hungary. The First Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, Mátyás Rákosi, tries to negate the Soviet change of political direction. In Budapest, the Petőfi Club is set up and organises regular discussion meetings for the anti-Stalinist intelligentsia.



FORTEPAN

**György Litván, member of the MDP, the Hungarian Communist Party, at a meeting of party activists in the 13th District:**

*I took a step forward. I was a bit nervous at first but then everything around me disappeared and I could see nothing – concentrated as I was on my task. [...] Then came the moment for the statement I had previously prepared [...]: "Fully conscious of my responsibilities as a Communist, I declare that neither the Hungarian people, nor the majority of Party members, place any trust in the current leadership of the Party and, above all, they do not trust Comrade Mátyás Rákosi. Only changes in personnel – and a stricter self-criticism than to date – can bring a solution to the situation."*

*I launched this statement directly at him, from a distance of just two steps. This was, indeed, a bloodless coup, a political knife-thrust, everyone present saw it as such. The roar of several hundred voices broke*

Budapest, 1956. Marketplace in the XIII District.



Berlin, 24 March 1956. Walter Ulbricht speaks at a conference of the Socialist Unity Party [SED] of [East] Germany.

BUNDESARCHIV

*out suddenly, as though a thousand bottles of champagne had been opened simultaneously. [...] One third of those present began to clap, to my way of thinking another one-third sympathised with me, and the remaining one-third stared at me with hatred and would gladly have strangled me on the spot. I returned to my seat and then, one after another, my adversaries began to speak.*

*[...] Rákosi was the last to speak. [...] He said: "I do not know you Comrade, I have never seen you, it is quite likely that you are decent man and mean well but as to what you are saying... [...], those are American promptings repeated like a parrot. Such whispers should be silenced, isolated, rejected..." – and all those present knew what this meant in his terminology.*

*It was then that the air around me suddenly became frosty and I felt the people sitting near me edging away. He concluded with those words.*

*I was prepared for the worst but nothing happened. [...] I returned home and spent half the night waiting for 'them' but they never came.*

**Budapest, 23 March**

➔ Interview with Györgi Litván conducted by Tóth Pál Péter, 1956th Institute OHA, No. 700, 1983, 1984.

## / 24 March

**German Democratic Republic (GDR).** Opening of the German SED – Socialist Unity Party – Conference. Some delegates call for an appraisal of the mistakes of the Stalinist era but they are derided by the majority of the participants, led by Walter Ulbricht, Secretary General of the Party.

### Wolfgang Harich, East German philosopher and journalist:

*It is absolutely essential that certain fundamental personnel changes be made in the leadership of the SED and in the government of the German Democratic Republic. In the first place, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED, Walter Ulbricht, should be removed from office, as well as Hilde Benjamin – the Minister of Justice, and also the East German Prosecutor General, Dr. [Ernst] Melsheimer. Only such steps can ensure that the SED leadership and the government of the GDR will win the confidence of their citizens.*

Berlin, 27 March

- *Der Prozeß gegen Walter Janka und andere [Proceedings against Walter Janka and others]*, ed. Inge Brodersen, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1990, quotation from: Kornélia Papp, *In Zwängen verstrickt. Auswege kommunistischer Schriftsteller aus der Machtideologie in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren in Ungarn und in der DDR [Entangled in coercion. How Communist writers extricated themselves from the ideology of the government in the 1950s and 1960s in Hungary and in the GDR]*, Herbolzheim 2014.

### Extract from STASI reports:

*In recent days, negative opinions of Comrade Walter Ulbricht have again emerged.*

– *Agricultural worker from State, [district of] Schwerin: “That Congress shows that we are nearing the end. Ulbricht will soon breathe his last.” [...]*

– *In the district of Magdeburg, a restaurant owner from Glindenberg, in the Wolmirstedt area, also made negative comments. He was surprised that Comrade Ulbricht had spoken at the III Congress of the Party, because he thought that Walter Ulbricht was in prison as a representative of the “Stalin line”. He said: “I would dearly love to know how long this charade will continue.”*

Berlin, 30 March

- *Die DDR im Blick der Stasi 1956. Die geheimen Berichte an die DDR Führung [The GDR in the eyes of the Stasi, 1956. Secret reports to the GDR authorities]*, ed. Henrik Bispinck, Göttingen 2016.

### 30 March

**Czechoslovakia.** Czechoslovak Communist Party Plenum comes to an end. Discussions centre on whether Khrushchev’s paper opens the way for a rehabilitation of Rudolf Slánský, former Secretary General of the Party, liquidated following false charges towards the end of 1952. The leadership of the Party endeavours to put an end to the

subject and to limit the possible influence of the paper on the situation in Czechoslovakia.

### Marie Švermová, imprisoned Communist activist:

*Information about the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party reached me in the Pankrác prison. I paced the cell and thought to myself: now I can surely count on a complete pardon, all the basic charges against me have been invalidated. I was in the right! The female prison warders were absolutely horrified by what they had learned about the 20th Congress. During the night, they opened the small window on my cell door and asked me what they should make of it all and what would happen to our country now. They were frightened; the atmosphere outside the prison must have changed.*

Prague

- Marie Švermová, *Vzpomínky [Reminiscences]*, Prague 2008.



Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, 1956. The Škoda manufacturing plant. Sign under the star reads: “Let us fight for the victory of peace and Socialism!”

**Poland.** Discussion clubs are set up by the intelligentsia and flourish; they are a natural continuation of the Warsaw Crooked Circle Club, active since 1955. Supporters, who include both Party and non-Party members, look to the discussions to provide means for political, social, economic and cultural changes. This leads to an increase in contacts – in the private and community sectors and among cultural institutions both in Poland and in the Polish diaspora abroad.

**Zbigniew Kubas, co-founder of the first Polish Young Intelligentsia Club in Brzozów, in the Podkarpacie region:**

*We met without any organisational formalities. [...] We would start a debate on the health service, judges would talk about the law, teachers about education and schooling ... [...]*

*This intellectual venture sparked [...] a community spirit in Brzozów, an aim towards something more than was available. [...] We soon built a swimming pool in Brzozów, then two schools, not to mention this hospital to some degree. [...] That group taught us to believe in ourselves, to believe we could achieve something... and that feeling has remained with us...*

**Brzozów**

➔ Zbigniew Kubas, *U nas, tak daleko, w Brzozowie. Rozmowa ze Stefanem Bratkowskim* [Here in Brzozów, so far away. Discussion with Stefan Bratkowski], in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie* [October 1956, the first breakthrough in the system], ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

**Jan Lechoń, poet:**

*In Poland, people grovel repentantly, Stalin is vilified [...]. They have not lost their fears, it's just that they are now beset by an even greater fear, a fear of the unknown – who will come to the fore now, what will they really want now, will what is now public news become a heresy and a crime in the future? This "thaw" is the sombre cavorting of slaves – proof that most of them will now never escape enslavement. I am almost more afraid of this 'revolt' than of that previous obedience – which seemed to us to be nothing more than a mask. It is terrifying to see what these people are going through.*

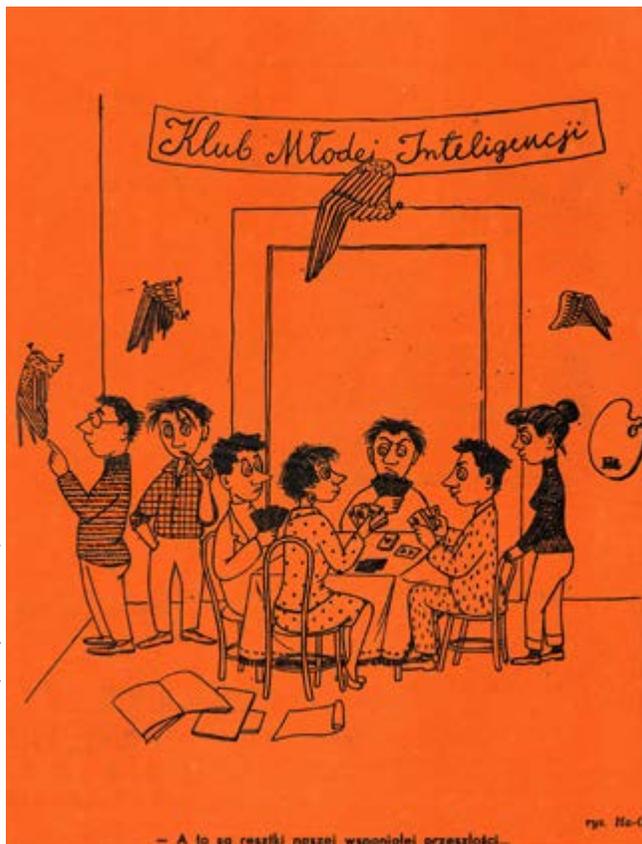
**New York, 17 April**

➔ Jan Lechoń, *Dziennik. 1 stycznia – 30 May 1956* [Diary. 1st January – 30th May 1956], Warsaw 1993.

**April**

**Poland.** Speaking in Łódź, Gen. Kazimierz Witaszewski, Head of the Polish Army Central Political Board and a prominent member of the 'Natalin' faction, makes a strong attack on the press and the intelligentsia for undermining the current order. He names the cosh (or gas pipe) as a suitable tool in defence of this current order and thus establishes the cosh as a symbol of the Party "hardliners". The Office of the Central Committee distances itself from Witaszewski's declaration, rejecting moves which would discriminate between the intelligentsia and the workers.

Satirical sketch entitled "The Young Intelligentsia Club". Bottom: "Such are the remains of our illustrious past..."



ANNA GOSŁAWSKA-LIPIŃSKA (HA-GA) / "SZPIKLIK" 1957, ISSUE 27



JÓZEF W. KAZIŃSKI / OŚRODEK KARTA

## 26 April

**Czechoslovakia.** During a student meeting at the Charles University in Prague, criticism is levelled at compulsory classes in Marxism and Leninism, and also at the jamming of Western radio-stations and automatic acceptance of Soviet models. Students announce their resolutions and also demand punishment for those responsible for abuse by the State Security apparatus and call for a control over it. The Resolution is then circulated to party and state institutions.

**Extract from a Resolution adopted by the Czechoslovak Youth Union of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics at Charles University:**

*We demand that the press, radio and filmed material provide the public with information more speedily and accurately and in a more independent manner than to date. Material relating to the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party took longer to reach us than did the*

*Western press and even the press of the rest of the People's Democratic bloc. Some important statements made by leading representatives of the international workers' movement did not even receive a mention. Paradoxically, it is bourgeois sources which are frequently faster in providing us with information concerning Party matters.*

Prague, 26 April

→ *Majáles 1956. Nevydařená revolta československých studentů [Student Festival 1956. The unsuccessful revolt of Czechoslovak students], ed. John Matthews, Brno 2000.*

## 27 April

**Poland.** Announcement of amnesty – relating not just to minor criminal acts but also to political cases. Among the latter, convictions of up to 5 years are quashed, more severe punishments reduced, and the death sentence reduced to 15 years imprisonment. More than 30,000 people, including 4,500 political prisoners, are released from prison during the following month.

## 29 April

**Poland.** An article entitled *Z własnego prawa bierz nadania [Strike while the iron is hot]*, written by Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz, appears in the journal “Nowa Kultura” [New Culture]. The article causes fierce attacks on the author.

**Extract from an article entitled *Z własnego prawa bierz nadania [Strike while the iron is hot]:***

*The recent political events following the 20th Congress are referred to by various names. They are labelled with such tags as “breakthrough”, “revision of judgement”, or “earthquake”. However, it seems that the political language of Marxism has more precise terms to describe such events. After all, that language uses the word ‘revolution’. What is happening now is, indeed, revolution. It is the revolt of the working masses against the fossilization of Socialism, the calcification of the ever thicker and harder shell of the bureaucratic system with its entire political, moral and traditional structure.*

Warsaw, 29 April

→ “Nowa Kultura” Issue no. 18, 29 April 1956.

London, 22 April 1956. Anti-Soviet demonstration by émigrés from Central and Eastern Europe Polish émigré protest.

# po prostu





FRANK SCHERERHEL / THE LIFE PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES

## 1 May

**Czechoslovakia.** During a May Day parade, a group of students stops before the Party VIP podium and shouts out demands for open discussion. Emotions run high in student circles for the next few days and give rise to fresh demands.

### Anton Blaha, lawyer, participant in Slovak protests:

*In the student circles to which I belonged, nobody organised us, nobody forced us or encouraged us to strike or rebel. These were our own feelings, we believed that they were true to [...] our beliefs and our lives. [...] Hardline politicians began to accuse us of coordinating protests between Prague and Bratislava, of being in league with reactionaries and that there had apparently even been attempts to overthrow the Socialist system.*

#### Bratislava

- Anton Blaha, *Maskám je všetko dovolené [Masks can do anything]*, in: *Pyžamová revolúcia [The Pyjama Revolution]*, ed. Anton Blaha et al, Bratislava 2007.

## 7 May

**Poland.** A nationwide student theatre review commences in Wrocław. Warsaw's STS (Student Satirical Theatre) and Gdańsk's 'Bim-Bom' receive awards. Such theatres, of which there were dozens in Poland at the time, were yet another platform enabling criticism of the current situation and calls for change...

### Andrzej Drawicz, co-founder of STS, literary critic:

*At that time, we were young Marxists. [...] We were afraid that the thaw would mean a washout of our ideals, that it would drown them in muddy bourgeois waters. [...] We observed the attitudes of professional opportunists who used the thaw to make a career for themselves. And it was these people who now became our favourite anti-heroes. And then, too, [...] there was a fear that the authorities might use a thaw as a trinket to dangle before the eyes of the people and thus to enforce their position which had become unstable in 1956.*

#### Warsaw

- Andrzej Drawicz, *Wczasy pod lufką [A holiday under fire]*, Warsaw 1997.



ZBIGNIEW KOSYCARZ / KFP

Czechoslovakia,  
1 May 1956.  
May Day  
celebrations.

Wrocław, Poland,  
7–10 May  
1956. Actors of  
the Gdańsk Bim-  
Bom Student  
Theatre in a  
sketch entitled  
*Circus* (a satire  
on Soviet films).

9 May

**Poland.** Talks commence between representatives of the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party and Władysław Gomułka. They concern the conditions of his possible return to political life. The former First Secretary is visited by members of both factions, each of whom tries to persuade him to join them, thus taking advantage of his positive image as a social victim of Stalinism.

**Jerzy Putrament, writer, Deputy-Chairman of the Association of Polish Writers and deputy member of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:**

*It was already Spring, and yet another meeting at the Writers' Club. In the corridor, [Wiktor] Woroszyński was sitting on the parapet of a window. His words came naturally, as though the matter was self-explanatory:*

*"You know, Comrade, more and more people throughout the country are awaiting Gomułka's return."*

*[...] I was surprised, indeed unpleasantly so.*

*I did not know Gomułka all that well at the time [...]. I accepted the opinions held by the current leadership about Gomułka without*



*question or protest. And that is why I saw this possible change almost as a personal threat to myself. [...] This feeling grew and sometimes drowned out any words.*

**Warsaw**

➔ Jerzy Putrament, *Pół wieku. Poślizg, Pisma [Half a century. A Delay, Writings]*, vol. 12, Warsaw 1987.

12 May

**Czechoslovakia.** In Bratislava, during the traditional *Majáles* student festival, banned during the Stalinist era, humorous banners appeared criticising living conditions, the pointless stress on the teaching of Marxism, or the length of military service. A few students even carried a coffin bearing the words "Academic freedom".

**Poland.** Traditional 'Juvenalia' student festivals commence in Kraków. They are accompanied by anti-régime slogans: demands for the truth and changes to the current constitution.

**Stefan Bratkowski, member of the District Council of the Polish Students' Union:**

*For the first time since the war, the Juvenalia festival provided an opportunity for mass street rallies. Third year students of Civil Engineering [...] had military training classes in Bronowice; instead, they played truant and made for Kraków city centre. First stop were the various halls of residence. They began with the Academy of Fine Arts building on Lea Street, home to the most beautiful girls in Kraków, where they chanted: "Come and join us. Come and join us!" At that, everyone ran out and within an hour and a half the crowd numbered thousands of young people making their way through the streets of Kraków, laughing and singing, repeating their "Come and join us!"*

*[...] The Civil Engineering lads led the demo to the head office of the Kraków press and once there several thousand voices roared: "Truth and bread! Truth and bread!". [...] And that's how we led the young people of Kraków out into the streets [...] and, because nothing happened to us, this later gave some sort of encouragement to the workers in Poznań.*

**Kraków, 12 May**

➔ Stefan Bratkowski, *Pod znakiem pomidora [Under the sign of the tomato]*, in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsądek [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth and sensibility]*, ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

Prague, Czechoslovakia, May 1956. Students take part in the traditional *Majáles* student festival. Banner reads: "For all senior officials, particularly in the Ministry of Education – a completely new medicine called DEKULTIT [from the words "de-" and "cult"] – bound to remove all student demands".



Prague,  
Czechoslovakia,  
May 1956.  
Students during  
*Májáles* festival.  
Banner on  
book-case reads:  
"Banned".

/ 14 June

**Poland.** Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, former Premier of the Government-in-Exile, returns to Poland. His decision is seen as a symbol of support for Edward Ochab's political team.

**Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz in a national broadcast:**

*I am immensely moved as I stand on Polish ground. I have always represented the political direction which was opposite to that which today's Polish government represents. The fact that I am greeted here with such good will, shows me that Poland is not divided into victors and vanquished but is just made up of Poles.*

Warsaw, 14 June

- "Zielony Sztandar" [The Green Standard] Issue no. 49, 20 June 1956, quote as per: Piotr Bojarski, 1956. *Przebudzeni [The Awakened]*, Warsaw 2016.

/ 15 June

**Czechoslovakia.** The Czechoslovak Communist Party Congress comes to an end. First Secretary Antonín Novotný states that the Party line does not require revision. The resolution of the students and their critical activity against the system are denounced but the authorities do not resort to acts of repression...

**Antonín Novotný in a speech at the Czechoslovak Communist Party Congress:**

*The working peoples have a right to expect that young people who have been given the opportunity of obtaining a higher education will not turn against the system but will work with all their strength to support the building of a Socialist community. [...] Recently, groups of reactionaries have made surreptitious attempts to make use of the criticism which the Party has purposely introduced into all aspects of our life so as to infiltrate the student ranks. [...] It should be openly stated that our peoples will not allow any abuse of our institutions of higher education.*

Prague, 15 June

- Speech given by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Comrade Antonín Novotný, "Nová mysl" [New Ideas] Issue no. 6, 1956.



/ Mid-June

**Poland.** Protests and lightning strikes in the Stalin Metalworks (previously ZISPO, and later – the Hipolit Cegielski Plants). They are set against the background of a severe housing crisis and – in particular – the raising of productivity norms and cuts in wages.

**Stefan Jędrzychowski, Deputy Prime Minister:**

*The generally enlivened discussion, some relaxation in pressure and liberalisation have resulted in disappointment with the results of the 6-year plan, especially in the field [level] of the standard of living. Claims for arrears of wages have re-appeared [...]. There is widespread discon-*

Warsaw, 14 June 1956. Arrival at Warsaw Airport of Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz, former Premier of the Polish Government-in-Exile.



Poznań, the 1950s. Table of productivity leaders in the ZISPO plant. Heading on notice board: "Youth in the front line of the battle to carry out the 6-year Plan ahead of time".

tent relating to several millions of zloties of wrongly unpaid wages. Revindication of arrears of wages spread throughout Poland [...].

#### Poznań

- ➔ Stefan Jędrzychowski – *Wspomnienia o Październiku 1956* [Stefan Jędrzychowski – *Reminiscences of October 1956*], in: Marcin Żukowski, *Okres Października '56 w relacji Stefana Jędrzychowskiego złożonej w roku 1983* [The October '56 period as related by Stefan Jędrzychowski in 1983], "Radzyński Rocznik Humanistyczny" Issue no. 11, 2013.

## 27 June

**Poland.** During a meeting with workers at the ZISPO Metalworks, the Industrial Plant Minister, Roman Fidelski, retreats from agreements made the previous day with their delegates. This sparks massive outrage.

**Stanisław Matyja**, a member of the ZISPO delegation, the informal leader of the protesters:

*An elderly workman emerged from the crowd [...]. He said to the Minister: "Look here – you'd better complete primary schooling first – before seeking a post as a minister". At that, an indescribable uproar broke out. Someone in the distance pointed out a rope to me, they were firmly intent on hanging the Minister.*

#### Poznań, 27 June

- ➔ Stanisław Matyja, *Działaliśmy jawnie i głośno* [We acted openly and out loud], in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsądek* [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth and sensibility], ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

**Hungary.** At a meeting of the Petőfi Club, devoted to the freedom of the press, the public chants slogans in support of Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister who – in the period 1953–55 – attempted to carry out a more liberal line and was displaced by supporters of the Stalinist *status quo*. After the meeting, Rákosi decides to suspend the activity of the Clubs and to introduce repressive measures aimed at the press.

**Tibor Déry, writer:**

*Let us look closely at today's situation. Those Comrades who take part in the discussions or listen to them, do not take into account a certain specific circumstance. They do not see that they are able to do so only because they have – shall we say – permission from above. [...]*

*The number of people who take part in one discussion after another numbers approximately 1,500–2,000; each professional group in turn gives vent to its anger at these discussions and then heaves a sigh of relief, comfortable in the knowledge that freedom of speech and freedom of criticism have been regained, and with them hope for the future. We let loose our words, delight in them as a child delights in a tin whistle but we do not notice that our words are just that – words, our hopes remain unsatisfied and our environment sees little change. [...]*

*We have regained freedom of speech in a falsely construed dimension; relaxed or even pleased, we listen to our own voices, while all around remains practically the same as it was.*

**Budapest, 27 June**

- Pető Iván, *A Petőfi Kör Sajtóvitájának Jegyzőkönyve* [Report from a Petőfi Club discussion on the subject of the press], "Beszélő online", <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/a-petofi-kor-sajtovitajanak-jegyzokonyve> [accessed: 03.07.2017].

**28 June**

**Poland.** A strike breaks out in the ZISPO Metalworks and quickly turns into a demonstration by many thousands of people outside the Provincial Headquarters of the Polish United Workers' Party. Economic demands are now accompanied by political demands – for freedom. Demonstrators destroy devices jamming foreign radio broadcasts and attack prisons. Shots aimed in the direction of the demonstration come from the State Security Forces building. Clashes break out between armed civilians and functionaries. In the afternoon, the army advances into Poznań.

**Stanisław Matyja:**

*A group of people barged its way into the Provincial Committee building [...], moments later, windows were opened and there were shouts of: "See how they live here!" Tableware and prepared meals, cold meats, vodka and other delicacies were displayed to the public. The demonstrators became agitated because they were fighting for bread, for reasonable productivity norms, fighting to be treated normally – and here was the leadership, ostensibly a people's leadership, living the high life. [...]*

*Events then took a fast turn. A patrol car arrived – from the direction of the post office on Kościuszki Street, I think. It was positioned strategically and people began to shout and protest. After a moment, I heard*

Budapest,  
27 June 1956.  
The writer, Tibor  
Tardos speaks  
during a meeting  
of the Petőfi  
Club.



ERICH LESSING / MAGNUM PHOTOS / PHOTO POWER



ŻADAMY CHLEBA

Poznań, 28 June 1956. Protesting workers carry banner: "We demand bread".

*the same voice as previously – it was [Wincenty] Kraško [Propaganda Secretary at the Provincial Committee]. He spoke for a minute, or so, and was dragged out of the patrol car. He was punched several times.*

**Poznań, 28 June**

➔ *Poznański Czerwiec 1956 [Poznań's June 1956]*, ed. Jarosław Maciejewski and Zofia Trojanowicz, Poznań 1981.

#### **Helena Przybyłek-Porębna, tram-driver:**

*A woman stood in a first or second floor window above the main gate [of the State Security building]. Suddenly, we heard the sound of shots. We could not see where they were coming from. A moment later, however, wounded demonstrators began to fall to the ground. People*



*began to disperse quickly and stopped at some distance, forming an enormous semi-circle. But those of us who held flags stood firm. Suddenly, I saw the woman I'd mentioned aiming at us with a machine pistol and shots immediately began to ring out. My legs felt hot and I fell. After a moment, I realised that it was I who had been shot.*

**Poznań, 28 June**

➔ *Poznański Czerwiec 1956. Relacje uczestników [Poznań's June 1956, Statements of participants]*, selection and editing: Aleksander Ziemkowski, Poznań 2008.

#### **Anna Kowalska, writer:**

*If the workers are sending their wives and children to their deaths in strike demonstrations – then that's the final straw. Of course, the 'Expresses' and other tabloids write of counter-revolution but, then, were the government and the Party not themselves a counter-revolution over all these years? Were the people who allowed workers' wages to be reduced by three to four hundred zloties, as the 'Express' claims... were those who calmly and with total lack of responsibility continued their bureaucratisation, counting on the fact that the workers would put up with anything, that they don't need to feel responsible if the poor don't survive... were they not all counter-revolutionaries and criminals? They lament because three metalworkers fell but the fact that the nation was on its last legs and continues to perish – oh, no – on that there is silence! Only now will the lies, the comedies, the sickening complaints commence. The army opens fire on the people, on working class women and children. No, it won't end there!*

**Warsaw 28 June**

➔ Anna Kowalska, *Dzienniki 1927–1969 [Diaries 1927–1969]*, Warsaw 2008.

#### **Extract from Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz's speech to the people of Poznań:**

*The blood which has been shed in Poznań can be laid at the door of imperialist spheres and the reactionary underground in Poland – it is they who are the direct perpetrators of the events. [...] Any provocateur or madman who dares to raise his hand against the people's authority can be sure that the same authority will not hesitate to lop off his hand in the interests of the working class, the working peasant and the intelligentsia, in the interests of the battle to raise the standards of living, or the interests of democratisation of our lives and the interests of our Motherland.*

**Warsaw, 29 June**

➔ "Trybuna Ludu" Issue no. 181, 30 June 1956.

Poznań, 28 June  
1956. Women's  
protest.



LESZEK PAPRZYCKI / WYDAWNICTWO MIEJSKIE POZNAŃ

### Jan Józef Szczepański:

*Official statements are typical. At first, there was talk of “a tragic mistake” made by “provocateurs”. Now it is just “provocateurs”, “fascist gangs” and “dregs of society”. Moscow points in no uncertain terms to “American dollars” as the cause. The press received a secret order to stop any critical articles. We are in for a new idyll – overshadowing an iron fist.*

Kasinka

→ Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945–1956 [Diary 1945–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 2009.

### 30 June

**Poland.** The number of arrests following the Poznań incidences rises to approximately 750. Many detainees were beaten during interrogation.

### Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, Director of Radio Free Europe’s “Voice of Free Poland”:

*An important issue arising from the Poznań incidents concerned the imminent trials. As the authorities announced that “those responsible will be punished with the full severity of the law”, [Wojciech] Trojanowski, in a broadcast entitled Reflektorem po kraju [Searchlight on the country], posed a series of questions: Will the arrestees be judged according to old Stalinist methods, will the hearings be open, will the defence have full use of freedom of speech? Will western journalists be allowed in the courts? The trials were to be a test – would the break with the abuses and crimes of the “bygone era” be confirmed in practice by Ochab’s team?*

#### Munich, 30 June

→ Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, *Wojna w eterze. Wspomnienia 1948–1956 [War in the radio waves, memoirs 1948–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 1991.



LESZEK PAPRZYCKI / WYDAWNICTWO MIEJSKIE POZNAŃ

Poznań, 28 June 1956. Protesters outside the offices of the State Security Forces.

Poznań, 28 June 1956. Tanks disperse protesters outside the offices of the State Security Forces.



Precz z dyktaturą

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WYKONANO ZAMÓWIENIE  
WRAZEM I WYKONANO  
W WARSZAWIE W 1956 R.

Poznań,  
28-29 June  
1956. Slogan on  
tram: "Out with  
dictatorship!"



IRENA JAROSIŃSKA / OŚRODEK KARTA

## Early July

**Poland.** Voices of support and solidarity with Poznań appear throughout Poland. They are formulated in letters to the press, radio, Party authorities, as well as in leaflets and slogans painted on walls. Strikes are organised in many industrial plants with similar demands to those made in Poznań.

### Extract from a letter signed "A Worker from Kielce":

*When I heard on the morning news on 5 July that aid from the American Red Cross had been rejected, I was both surprised and shocked.*

*Those who had rejected the aid spoke in their own names, not on behalf of the nation – their salaries do not waver between 500–800 zloties like those of the average proletarian worker, they do not live in hovels and slums like hundreds of thousands of oppressed workers who are told: "Yours is the power." They do not worry about what they'll put in the pot for dinner; they enjoy life and entertain each other with foreign wines and various delicacies [...].*

*Ask the workers of ZISPO, of "Pumeks" or other plants who it was who forced the weapons into their hands – was it not the conditions created by the "power of the people"? Shortly, workers will stand before the courts, workers who demanded their human rights. Yet this is not fair – there, in the dock – should be the people who had brought about this situation, the people who had tightened the noose around the necks of thousands of Poznań's working people. It was not "foreign enemies" who had done so but the empty stomachs of those who, for 12 years, had been, and still are being, robbed.*

Kielce, 9 July

➔ *Księga listów PRL-u [Compendium of letters from the People's Republic], vol. 2, selection and editing: Grzegorz Sołtysiak, Warsaw 2005.*

### Jerzy Stempowski in a letter to Jerzy Giedroyc:

*If Warsaw journals write of provocation then this will be proof that they are no more free than previously, and that they have to repeat what "Pravda" prints. There's no other way. [...]*

*It is finally clear that, after several months of rowdy rebellion and euphoria, and particularly after the events which took place in Poznań, we will now have a period of expiation, with the inevitable "замаливания грехов" [Russian: supplication for forgiveness] before the Kremlin.*

Bern, 17 July

➔ Jerzy Giedroyc, Jerzy Stempowski, *Listy 1946–1969 [Letters 1946–1969]*, Part 1, Warsaw 1998.

Warsaw, the 1950s. Children playing against a background of the ruins on Grzybowska Street.

6 July

**Poland.** “Trybuna Ludu” publishes an article by Krzysztof Wolicki entitled *Pierwsze wnioski* [Initial conclusions]. That same day the article is condemned by the Politburo and Jerzy Morawski, the newspaper’s editor-in-chief (and Central Committee Secretary connected with the reform faction), is sacked.

**Extract from article *Pierwsze wnioski* [Initial conclusions]:**

*‘Poznań’s Thursday’ had two aspects: that of the frustration of the workers and that of a hostile revolt against the people’s government. [...] The strikes staged by Poznań workers – and this fundamental, painful truth cannot be masked or ignored – was to no small degree caused by the bureaucratic manipulations of our proletariat state, our state, our government.*

Warsaw, 6 July

→ “Trybuna Ludu” Issue no. 87, 6 July 1956.

7 July

**Poland.** The report of an enquiry – headed by Edward Gierek, Secretary of the Central Committee – into the circumstances of the Poznań incidents is presented at a meeting of Provincial First Secretaries of the Polish United Workers’ Party. According to the report, this was a planned diversionary tactic instigated by centres hostile to the people’s leaders, which exploited the dissatisfaction of the workers. During the discussion, many activists, including Edward Ochab, attack the press for undermining the authority of the country’s leadership.

**Edward Ochab during a meeting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party, on the subject of the effects of the so-called Gierek Commission:**

*Personally, I believe that – to a great degree – we have lost a sense of proportion in our work, an objective assessment of the proportions of what has been achieved and of the difficulties which we now face [...]. Based on these realities, we must strive for the increased development of our industry and retention of our authority – by any means at our disposal. It is we who are responsible for the growth of liberalism among the various gossips and muck-spreaders who have undermined*



WOJCIECH KONDRACKI / PAP

Poznań. A portrait of Bolesław Bierut in the offices of the State Security Forces, came under fire during the Poznań incidents.

*the authority of our leaders; we were unable to differentiate between the boundaries of justified criticism, which should be amplified, and the defamation of our leadership and our political system.*

Warsaw, 7 July

→ AAN, KC PZPR, 237/V–237, k. 1–95, kopia, mps., quote as per: *Poznański Czerwiec 1956. Wybór dokumentów* [Poznań’s June 1956. Selection of documents], vol. 1, selection and editing: Stanisław Jankowiak, Rafał Kościański, Edmund Makowski, Rafał Reczek, Poznań 2012.

18 July

**Hungary.** Tension grows within the country and the Party. Under pressure from Moscow, Mátyás Rákosi resigns. He is succeeded by Ernő Gerő, who was equally responsible for the crimes of the Stalinist era and also equally opposed to any changes. The press, which is also Party-based, begins to speak out with increasing force against the *status quo*.

**Poland.** Start of the VII Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. During stormy discussions, it soon becomes obvious that the Party is divided into two factions. The "Natoлин" group's main demands are for personnel changes and they are quick to remind the "Puławy" group that its members belonged to the most resolute architects of Stalinism. The latter, on the other hand, are more in favour of a revision of the mechanisms of the system and they accuse their adversaries – often justifiably – of frequent anti-Semitic resentment in the Party and in society at large. During the Plenum, the Prosecutor General, Marian Rybicki, admits that there is no proof that the Poznań incidents were influenced by imperialist agents. During the duration of the Plenum, Nikolai Bulganin, Premier of the USSR, takes part in the 22nd July ceremonies, marking the 1944 manifesto which proclaimed Poland's Interim Communist Government.

**Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, writer:**

*The surge of the revolutionary wave grew ever larger. At the top, nobody seemed to realise that chopping off hands is not the best remedy for an ailing society and at the VII Plenum of the Polish United Workers' Party, Edward Ochab toned down the words of the Premier, promising an improvement in the standard of living and the introduction of reforms.*

Warsaw, 18 July

→ Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, *Lwy STS-u [The lions of STS]*, Warsaw 2005.

**Nikolai Bulganin:**

*It would be wrong not to realise that the advent of the war against the cult of the individual has resulted not only in a revival of hostile and opportunistic elements but has also led to the emergence of suspicious and dubious characters in our own ranks. Misled by enemy propaganda, these people often misinterpret various hypotheses relating to the cult of the individual and this has found its expression in the pages of some official media in Socialist countries, including Poland.*

Warsaw, 22 July

→ Zbysław Rykowski, Wiesław Władyka, *Polska próba. Październik '56 [A Polish Attempt. October '56]*, Kraków 1989.

**2 August**

**Poland.** Władysław Gomułka, Marian Spychalski and Zenon Kliszko (also imprisoned during the war with "the enemy within") are accept-



GWIDON MIKLAZIEWSKI / "SZPILKI" 1956, ISSUE 37

Drawing from a series entitled "Scenes from the field" on the front page of the satirical journal "Szpilki". Text reads: "Comrade Chairman, what's on the agenda?" – "First, we'll tackle the resolutions of the VII Plenum, and then you'll tackle the removal of my furniture to my new apartment".

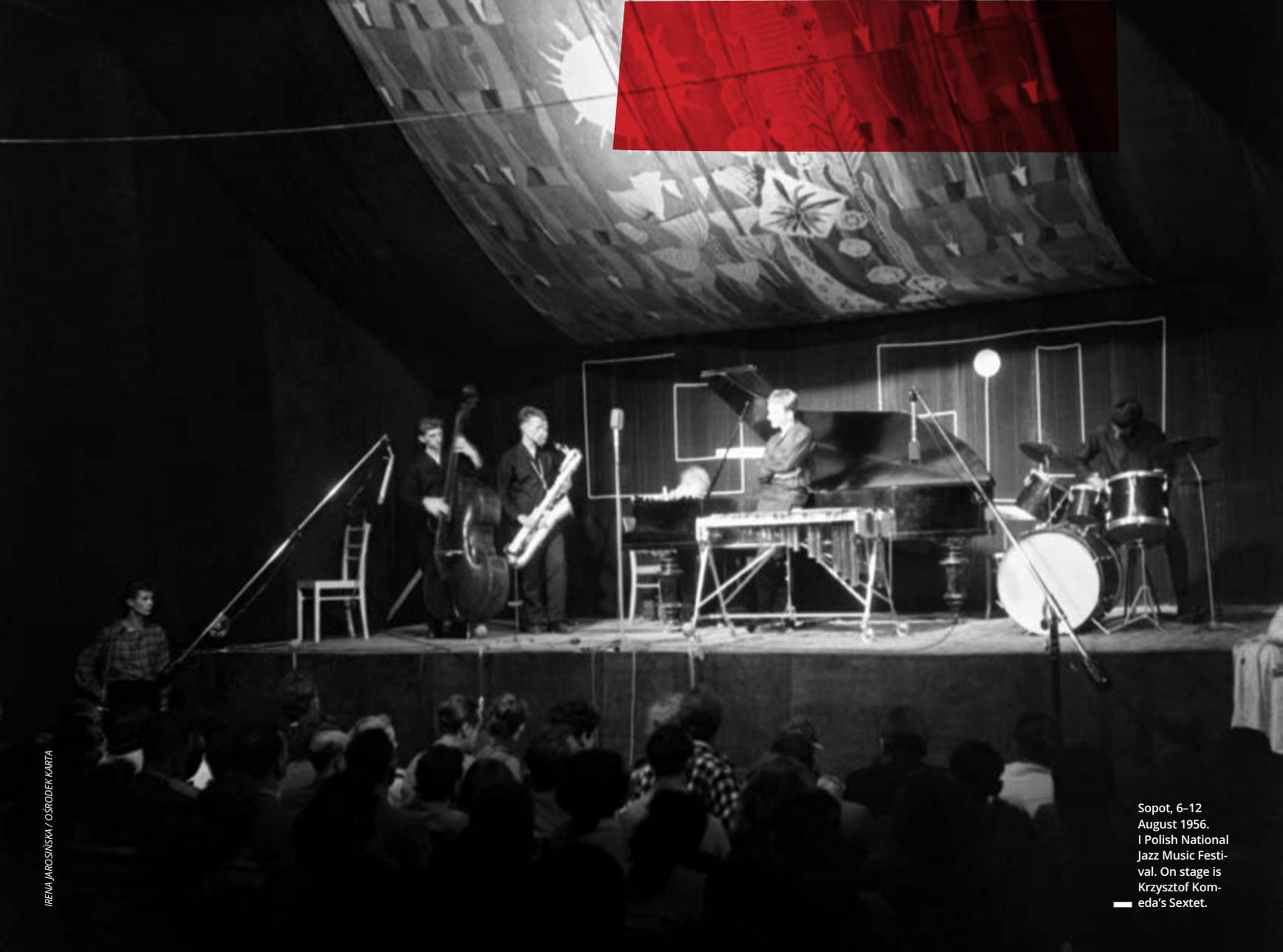
ed back into the folds of the Polish United Workers' Party. Throughout the country voices are raised, demanding the return of Gomułka – as a victim of the Stalinist system – to the country's leadership.

**Stefan Staszewski:**

*Gomułka was not a new figure but the public looked out for him (the Party was to do so much later). Society realised that it would not be able to get rid of the Communist leadership of the country, so it looked for a Communist with – as it thought – a more human face. [...] This led to a curious situation: it was not Gomułka who pushed for the leadership, the impetus came from the people themselves.*

Warsaw

→ Teresa Torańska, *Oni [They]*, Warsaw 2004.



/ 12 August

**Poland.** The I Jazz Festival comes to an end in Sopot. It becomes a symbolic confirmation that this genre of music – outlawed during the Stalinist era – is spreading to the public sector, albeit not without opposition. The clothes worn by the participants, modelled on western fashion, are a way of manifesting freedom.

**From an article by “Krystyna”, entitled *Sprawa raczej ponura* [A somewhat sombre matter]:**

*The fact that, instead of banners, four overgrown youths carried [models of] four significant letters, that half-clad aroused young girls cavorted in a dance fashion, that young men with idiotic hairstyles capered to the sounds of a samba – those are just minor details. It is the spectacle itself which is curious. Tight drainpipes [jeans], shirts hanging out, the idiotic fringes worn by the boys, the jumpers with cleavages à la Sophia Loren, the bedraggled hairstyles and blasé expressions on the inane faces... If this is to be a thaw, then a thirty-degree frost is a better option.*

Sopot, 14 August

→ “Dziennik Bałtycki” Issue no. 193, 14 August 1956.

/ 26 August

**Poland.** At the shrine in Częstochowa, several hundred thousand pilgrims witness the Jasnogóra Pledges of the Polish Nation – a prayer written by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who had been kept in solitary confinement since the autumn of 1953.

**Tadeusz Mazowiecki, writer and Catholic activist:**

*Around half a million people. It was hoped that perhaps the Primate himself, Cardinal Wyszyński, might appear, that he might be released. The Bishop’s throne stood empty with just a bunch of red and white flowers. Everyone knew that the words of the pledges had been written by the Primate whilst in confinement; they were read out by Bishop [Michał] Klepacz. This was yet another event which gave general hope that changes might take place, especially as the pledges contained a long-term moral programme and were addressed to the entire nation. This event was also proof of the re-emergence of*



ERICH LESSING / MAGNUM PHOTOS / PHOTO POWER

*the Church’s strength which had managed to gather together such masses of people.*

Jasna Góra, 26 August

→ Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Zygmunt Skórzyński, *Historia nie tylko złudzeń: Październik 56* [A History – not just of illusions: October 56], in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsądek* [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth, sensibility], ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

Sopot, 12 August 1956. The Jazz Festival ends with the Miss Sopot Contest.



Częstochowa,  
Poland, 26  
August 1956.  
Procession carrying a picture  
of the Madonna  
during celebra-  
tions of the Jas-  
nogóra Pledges.

## 1 September

**Hungary.** Géza Losonczy, a journalist associated with the reform faction, publishes an article in "Művelt Nép"; in it, he as much as demands a revision of the entire policy of the Hungarian Workers' Party. In the following weeks, the press campaign for reforms gathers momentum. Students join the campaign, demanding not just the return of Imre Nagy but also free elections and withdrawal of Soviet troops.

## September

**Poland.** The first workers' council is set up in the FSO Saloon Car Plant in Warsaw's Żerań district. On the one hand, the increasingly popular move towards workers' councils was intended as a mouthpiece for industrial plant employees, on the other hand, it was meant to have a positive effect on their productivity. Lechosław Goździk, Chairman of the Polish United Workers' Party [PZPR] and leader of the workers in Żerań, establishes contact with students and intelligentsia who favour reforms.

### Lechosław Goździk:

*It is interesting to note that, during those first elections in the FSO plant, it did not matter whether someone was a Party member or not; people were chosen out of respect for them and their competence... and their ability to achieve something for the plant. Election results reflected the proportion of Party members versus non-Party members among the employees. [...]*

*We had a basis for hope that we really would become decision makers. [...] At that time, nobody dreamt that we could build capitalism. You had to be suicidal to even think of something like that and, anyway, there was no money.*

#### Warsaw

→ Lechosław Goździk, *Byliśmy u siebie w domu [We were in our own home]*, in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsządek [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth, sensibility]*, ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

## 15 September

**China.** Commencement of the Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in Peking. It is attended by Edward Ochab. He is on the lookout

for support for the plans of the Polish United Workers' Party to widen the scope of independence from the Soviet Communist Party.

### Edward Ochab:

*I spoke with all four of them: Mao [Zedongji], Czou En-laj [Zhou Enlai], Czu Te [Zhu De] and Liu Szao-tsi [Liu Shaoqi]. The gist of my discourse boiled down to the fact that we, in Poland, want to deal with our matters by ourselves. Among others, I mentioned that we want to bring Gomulka back to the leadership and to some degree to right the wrongs which he had suffered, and that this should actually strengthen and consolidate our Party. Our Chinese comrades reacted very positively to our plans.*

#### Peking

→ Teresa Torańska, *Oni [They]*, Warsaw 2004.

## 27 September

**Poland.** After being postponed several times, trials of the participants in the Poznań incidents now commence. Fearing the reaction of western observers, the authorities do not charge the workers with organising a strike but with "acts of hooliganism". Noteworthy is the attitude of the lawyers who – in contrast to trials during the Stalinist era – really do stand up in defence of their clients.

### Extract from speech by defence lawyer of unknown accused in the "trial of the nine" (transcript):

*I know that the prosecution would prefer to see a precisely defined personal responsibility relating to each of the accused who are sitting here in the dock; it wants to narrow down the proceedings. However, we are all aware that these people did not just appear out of thin air [...], indeed, [...] they were led out into the streets by a clear motive and we want to define that motive. We know that the 28th June was no ordinary day. [...]*

*Why then, here in this courtroom, should we not find an open answer to the question – where did these people come from, why did half of Poznań find itself out on the streets on that day?*

#### Poznań

→ PANAWOP, sygn. P.III-93, Materiały J. Sandorskiego, teczka 8, k. 333–343, quote from: *Poznański Czerwiec 1956. Wybór dokumentów [Poznań's June 1956. Selection of documents.]*, vol. 1, selection and editing: Stanisław Jankowiak, Rafał Kościański, Edmund Makowski, Rafał Reczek, Poznań 2012.



Poznań,  
27 September  
1956. One of  
the show trials  
which followed  
the June inci-  
dents.

/ 6 October

**Hungary.** Exhumation and repeat funeral of László Rajka, Minister of Internal Affairs, sentenced to death in 1949 – during a wave of purges throughout Eastern Europe – under false accusations of having connections with Tito. The funeral is transformed into a demonstration by 100,000 participants, dissatisfied with the politics of Ernő Gerő's political team.

**Elek Nagy, a turner, trade union leader in the Csepel factory:**

*The factory intended to send three representatives to Rajko's funeral [...], while we were expected to meekly carry on working. This caused a revolution on a grand scale. How come – were we not to be allowed to attend the funeral of a hero? [...]*

*We stopped the machines, made our way to the washrooms and the entire shopfloor left the factory. Let them register us on the absentee list! And we left. Perhaps it was not so much that we wanted to pay homage to the memory of Rajko, as to express our displeasure at the current government, the leadership and the political situation. [...] Some 1,000 people from the Csepel factory went to the funeral.*

**Budapest, 6 October**

➔ *A forradalom emlékezete. Személyes történelem [Memories of the revolution. A personal history], ed. Adrienne Molnár, Zsuzsanna Kőrösi, Márkus Keller, Budapest 2006.*



ULLSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES



AP PHOTO / EAST NEWS

**Jenő Széll, art historian, former Hungarian Ambassador to Bucharest:**

*Rajko's funeral was terrible! [...] Crowd after crowd of people with drawn faces. It was an event rarely seen in the streets of Budapest – people walked along, greeted acquaintances but did not form groups as they do in today's official funerals. [...] It was there that we heard the words: "Never again, comrades!". [...] That was the first time in years that I burst into a torrent of tears. And I was not the only one in such a state.*

**Budapest, 6 October**

➔ *A forradalom emlékezete. Személyes történelem [Memories of the revolution. A personal history], ed. Adrienne Molnár, Zsuzsanna Kőrösi, Márkus Keller, Budapest 2006.*

Budapest,  
6 October 1956.  
Deputy Premier  
Antal Apró  
speaking during  
the funeral of  
László Rajka.

Budapest,  
6 October 1956.  
Repeat funeral  
of László Rajka,  
following his  
pardon.

9 October

**Poland.** Student rally at Warsaw Technical University attended by delegates from various factories and workplaces. Participants demand democratisation, worker control over the activities of plants and open politics – including disclosure of the subject of talks between the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party and Gomułka. Resolution put forward by the students is published in "Po Prostu".

#### Lechosław Goździk:

*Masses of people outside the Technical University because they could not all fit in inside; we enter from the front, into the hall; we barely managed to push our way through. All around were raucous voices, whistles, shouts of – 'out!' [...] The demonstration was organised by the students, it was the first demonstration by the Technical University and they had invited officials, too. [...]*

*I made my way to the podium and stood there like a nincompoop [...] they were yelling and whistling, so finally I lost my temper and started to whistle, too. Except that I was whistling into the microphone and, therefore, my whistle was amplified. I look around – they've stopped whistling and are waiting to see what's happening. So I then told them that any idiot can whistle, and I can, too; and then I posed a question – are we to take advantage of this chance, which has appeared in our country, or do we whistle our way past the chance? If you want to, we can carry on whistling. If not, then let me speak. At that I heard: 'Let him speak!' So I started to speak. [...] About what had happened in our country, about what we are doing in our plant in Żerań, what should – in my opinion – be done in our country. And we reached an understanding. [...] We sang the Polish national anthem "Poland is not yet lost..." and then we all made our way home. [...]*

*I had this sort of inner conviction that this must work, that there is simply no other solution. Certainly, the powers-that-be had never faced such a situation. [...] This was an authentic workers' movement – an action carried out by the very workers to whom the authorities always referred, a movement within industrial plants.*

Warsaw, 9 October

- ➔ Lechosław Goździk, *Byliśmy u siebie w domu [We were in our own home]*, in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsądek [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth, sensibility]*, ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

12 October

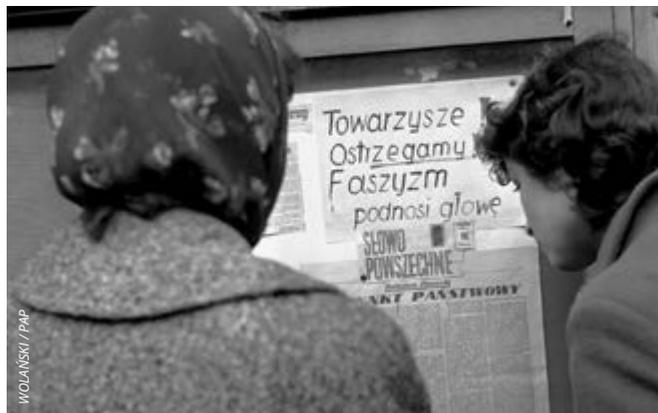
**Poland.** Władysław Gomułka takes part in a sitting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. He criticises the economic policies to date and also draws attention to the necessity of normalising Polish-Soviet relations.

#### Extract from Władysław Gomułka's speech at a sitting of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:

*Our entire life must now be governed by the principles of this new life, the principles of democratisation, any return to the old processes has to bring worse results. You can govern a country once you have lost its confidence but only with the help of bayonets, and anyone who takes that option, opts for total failure. We cannot return to the old methods.*

Warsaw, 12 October

- ➔ Gomułka i inni. Dokumenty z archiwum KC 1948–1982 [Gomułka and others. Documents from the Central Committee Archives, 1948–1982], selection and editing: Jakub Andrzejewski [in reality: Andrzej Paczkowski], London 1987.



Warsaw,  
16 October 1956.  
Article written  
by Bolesław  
Piasecki  
entitled *Instyngt  
państwowy [The  
Instinct of the  
State]*, published  
in "Słowo  
Powszechne",  
and displayed on  
a notice board  
in Warsaw Uni-  
versity. Heading:  
"Comrades! Be  
warned! Fascism  
is raising its  
head".

#### Mieczysław Jastrun:

*Gomułka's return to political life is widely commented. I confess that I have no confidence in the fuss which surrounds him nor do I know what he now stands for. To me it all looks like an attempt to restore authority to a matter which has been compromised. [...]*



*What next? Throughout Poland the atmosphere is that of an impending revolution, tension, and expectation. Some people fear Russian provocation.*

**Warsaw, 16 October**

➔ Mieczysław Jastrun, *Dziennik 1955–1981 [Diary 1955–1981]*, Kraków 2002.

**16 October**

**Hungary.** The atmosphere has not calmed down after Rajko's repeat funeral. The Party leadership attempts to convince people that it is capable of change. The crisis deepens. One contributory factor is the news from Poland that intervention by the Soviet army is expected.

An Association of Hungarian Students' Organisations is set up (MEFESZ – Magyar Egyetemistákés Főiskolások Szövetsége).

**Tamás Kiss, co-founder of MEFESZ:**

*A long table stood on the platform in the 'Auditorium Maximum' but nobody sat behind it. [...] We went up on the dais. [...] Silence. It was then that I announced that we are opening a student meeting [...]. Everything happened so spontaneously; just an hour or two earlier we would not have dreamt that we would be organising a meeting and that we would be speaking before eight hundred students. The timing was right. [...]*

*Suddenly, Tivadar Putnik, a student aged perhaps three or four years older than us, stood up. [...]: "Since you're already making demands in academic and social matters, let's also demand that Rákosi be punished and Imre Nagy reinstated as Premier!" He then spelt out four or five political demands. There was silence at first, then cheering broke out. And then tongues were loosened, people kept interrupting each other – I could not keep up with calling the next speaker – everyone had some sort of political demand to add.*

**Szeged, 16 October**

➔ *Pontosan tudtam, mire számíthatok [I knew exactly what to expect].* Interview with Tamás Kiss, conducted by Adrienne Molnár, 1956th Institute – OHA, No. 734, [http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/oha\\_document.asp?id=455&order=2#fnj\\_3](http://server2001.rev.hu/oha/oha_document.asp?id=455&order=2#fnj_3), [access: 03.07.2017].

**18 October**

**Poland.** Edward Ochab is informed by the USSR Ambassador that a delegation of top Soviet leaders is to visit Poland the following day. Moscow is concerned by the development of the political situation on the Vistula, the calls for changes in Polish-Soviet relations and the expected changes of personnel in the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party. The Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party informs the Communist parties of China, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania and the GDR of the proposed action against Poland.

**Extract from a telegram from the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party:**

*There has recently been a serious clash among the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party regarding assessment of the Party's actions in the face of the internal situation, and of the measures which*

Cover page of the Hungarian journal "Szabadság" with a photograph of the meeting of members of the MEFESZ Students' Association at Szeged University in October 1956.

should be undertaken as a result. This conflict concerns basic matters of the Party's and the State's internal and foreign policies, as well as the structure of the Party leadership. Since the situation in Poland is of such profound importance for the Socialist bloc, and especially for the USSR, we find the situation in the leadership of the Polish Communist Party intensely worrying. Under the circumstances, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party considers it essential to send a delegation to Poland, composed of Comrades Khrushchev, [Lazar] Kaganovitsch, Mikoyan and [Vyacheslav] Molotov.

#### Moscow, 18 October

- Shen Zhihua, *Rola Chin w rozwiązywaniu kryzysu październikowego 1956 r. Analiza postawy Chin wobec wydarzeń w Polsce i na Węgrzech [China's role in the solution of the October 1956 crisis. An analysis of China's attitude to events in Poland and Hungary]*, "Polski Przegląd Dyplomatyczny" [Polish Diplomatic Review] 2005, vol. 5, Issue no. 4.

### / 19 October

**Poland.** During the night, two Soviet Army divisions leave their bases in Lower Silesia and Western Pomorze and head for Warsaw. Also headed for Warsaw are troops of the Warsaw Military Sector, which are responsible to the head of the Ministry of Defence, Konstanty Rokossowski. At 7 a.m. the Soviet delegation, headed by Nikita Khrushchev, lands in Warsaw's Okęcie airport. The delegation includes members of the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. The delegation arrives without an invitation from the Polish leadership.

#### Władysław Gomułka:

*Already on their arrival at the airport, the Soviet Comrades, and Comrade Khrushchev in particular, made a spectacle of themselves. [...] As soon as he left the plane, Khrushchev first greeted the Soviet generals and Marshal Rokossowski, ignoring the members of the Polish Politburo and members of the government. He then approached the Polish delegation and in raucous tones began to shout in Russian at Comrade Ochab, saying: "Comrade you'll never get away with this," all the time pointing his finger at Ochab in a threatening manner. We reacted calmly to this display, not wanting to make a public spectacle in front of the Soviet generals and their chauffeurs.*

#### Warsaw, 19 October

- Notatka z rozmów przeprowadzonych w dniach 11 i 12 stycznia 1957 r. między delegacjami Komunistycznej Partii Chin i PZPR [Note on talks which took place on 11th and 12th January between delegates of the Communist Party of China and the Polish United Workers' Party], in: Andrzej Werblan, *Rozmowy Władysława Gomułki z Zhou Enlaiem w 1957 [Talks between Władysław Gomułka and Zhou Enlai in 1957]*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1997, R. 29, z. 4.



IRENA JAROSIŃSKA / OSRODEK KARTA

Warsaw, the  
1950s. Voluntary  
workers.

**Poland.** At about 8.30 a.m. talks commence in the Belweder Palace between the Soviet delegation and the Polish delegates, including Edward Ochab and Władysław Gomułka. Khrushchev expresses his discontent with the proposed personnel changes in the Polish United Workers' Party. Talks break off and the Polish members make their way to the opening of the VIII Plenum.

### **Władysław Gomułka:**

*In the Belweder Palace, Comrade Khrushchev immediately declared: "We will intervene with force and we will not allow your intentions to come to fruition." At this, I told him we would not continue any talks until he removes the revolver from the table – that is: until he retracts his threats.*

**Warsaw, 19 October**

- ➔ *Notatka z rozmów przeprowadzonych w dniach 11 i 12 stycznia 1957 r. między delegacjami Komunistycznej Partii Chin i PZPR, [Note on 11th and 12th January talks between delegates of the Communist Party of China and the Polish United Workers' Party] in: Andrzej Werblan, *Rozmowy Władysława Gomułki z Zhou Enlaiem w 1957 [Talks between Władysław Gomułka and Zhou Enlai in 1957], "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1997, R. 29, z. 4.**

**Poland.** 10 a.m.: A meeting of the VIII Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party commences in the Council of Ministers offices in Aleje Ujazdowskie. Władysław Gomułka is co-opted onto the Central Committee. The Plenum decides that the talks with the Soviet delegation will be led by Gomułka and members of the Politburo. The Plenum discussions are postponed to the following day. Talks in the Belweder Palace begin again in the afternoon.

### **Anastas Mikoyan, member of the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party:**

*You underestimate the dangers. Anti-Party and anti-Soviet propaganda is rife in Poland. [...] the Polish Press equates Stalin's Soviet regime with fascism. We are worried that the current situation in Poland is undermining belief in Socialism and weakening us [...].*

*If you are in favour of friendship, how do we interpret the discussions in the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party about the removal of Soviet commanders from the Polish Army? [...] If you have no need of the Warsaw Pat – say so. Clearly, our military cooperation is also being undermined.*

**Warsaw, 19 October**

- ➔ *Dokumenty centralnych władz Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej marzec-listopad '56 [Documents of the central authorities of the Polish United Workers' Party, March – November '56], selection and editing: Marek Jabłonowski et al, Warsaw 2009.*

**Poland.** The talks take their course, interrupted from time to time with information about the progress of the troops and the situation in Warsaw. After 2 p.m., Roman Zambrowski, a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, reads out the following communiqué: Soviet and Polish troops are nearing Warsaw; the workers of the FSO plant have decided to take to the streets to stop them.

At about 4 p.m., Marshal Rokossowski reads out yet another piece of news about attempts to lead workers out into the streets in order to block the city. The Politburo sends Zambrowski and Gierek out to the workers, to calm the atmosphere.



MIECZYSLAW PIOTROWSKI / "SZPIŁKI" 1956, ISSJUE 44

Sketch entitled  
October winds  
blew as usual.  
Text reads:  
"Trybuna Ludu  
– Special sup-  
plement – VIII  
Plenum".



HENRYK GRZEŚNY / PAP

**Karol Modzelewski, Warsaw University student of history, participant in the action in the FSO plant:**

*[Lechosław] Goździk proposed that we should load trucks with sand, prepare bottles filled with petrol and take with us forged metal blanks (easier to throw than bricks), and also flags – red and white, and red – and then block the road to Warsaw. “When the tank commander opens the turret, we’ll sing the Internationale and the Polish national anthem. Our soldiers won’t shoot. But if they’re Ruskis...” – here he made a gesture as though to say that then we’d use the metal forgings and petrol.*

**Warsaw, 19 October**

→ *Emocje rewolucji. Październik 56: wspomnienia świadków [Revolutionary emotions. October 56: recollections of witnesses], Jolanta Zarembina, “Polityka” Issue no. 45, 1 November 2016.*

**Stefan Staszewski:**

*The Internal Security Corps issued 800 weapons, a couple of machine guns, as well as hand grenades, to the workers’ militia, which had been set up in the car factory in Żerań. At the time, various self-defence groups were being established in many industrial plants but only the workers’ militia in Żerań was armed [...]. These workers were to organise cover for Warsaw, against the Polish units which Gen. Huszcza had sent out from the Pomorze district and which were heading for Warsaw. Independently of these units, Soviet troops were also heading for Warsaw but, as they were stationed further away, the immediate danger came from the Polish forces commanded by Gen. Huszcza. The workers’ militia from Żerań set off to meet them. It was given orders to infiltrate the unit and to demobilise it politically. The workers did, indeed, penetrate the ranks and commenced their agitation and, as a result, the army was halted.*

**Warsaw, 19 October**

→ Teresa Torañska, *Oni [They]*, Warsaw 2004.

**Poland.** 7 p.m.: Khrushchev reads out a communiqué, according to which, Stefan Staszewski, First Secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party is mobilising the capital’s workers in order to support the future composition of the Politburo. As far as the Soviet side is concerned, the fact that personnel matters are becoming a topic for ‘the streets’ is proof that the Polish leadership of the Party has no control over the situation.

At about 8 p.m., there is a further communiqué about the movement of Soviet and Polish tanks headed towards Warsaw. The Soviet side is unconcerned, explaining that these are “planned exercises”. The situation appears to have reached stalemate, neither side intends to give way.

Warsaw,  
October 1956.  
Lechosław  
Goździk during  
a rally in the FSO  
car plant in the  
Żerań district.

**Extract from notes on the talks between the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party:**

*Comrade Gomułka: We can hear out your opinion about the internal situation in Poland but the final decision is ours. Comrade Khrushchev is meddling in our affairs and is mistaken in saying that we are against friendship.*

*Comrade Kaganovich: Comrade Khrushchev is merely making a political assessment of the facts.*

*Comrade Gomułka: Comrade Khrushchev said that removal of Comrade Rokossowski from the Politburo will mean a break-up of the Warsaw Pact.*

*Comrades Khrushchev and Mikoyan: Yes.*

*Comrade Gomułka: You have no right to threaten us. [...] What do you suggest?*

*Comrade Khrushchev: Mend matters. Take steps against mutual enemies and rebuild the policy of friendship with the USSR. [...]*

*Comrade Gomułka: I see no other way out except the one which we have set out.*

**Warsaw, 19 October**

- ➔ *Dokumenty centralnych władz Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej marzec-listopad '56 [Documents of the central authorities of the Polish United Workers' Party, March – November '56], selection and editing: Marek Jabłonowski et al, Warsaw 2009.*

**Poland.** At about 9 p.m. Khrushchev suddenly changes his attitude and accepts the Polish terms.

**Extract from notes on the talks between delegates of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:**

*Comrade Khrushchev: I've been sitting here and thinking – you want to free yourself from our advisors in your army and from the KGB. We cannot stubbornly insist that they remain. [...] I confess that we came here to [...] influence you. [...] I can see that you don't want to go along with us, nor are you doing so. You make your own decisions but, be warned, the responsibility for them is yours, too.*

*Comrade Gomułka: We are aware that we are taking responsibility for Poland on ourselves.*

*Comrade Khrushchev: I'm not just talking about internal responsibility – it's a responsibility before our entire bloc. We will go back home and discuss with the Praesidium of the Central Committee what to do next.*

**Warsaw, 19 October**

- ➔ *Dokumenty centralnych władz Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej marzec-listopad '56 [Documents of the central authorities of the Polish United Workers' Party, March – November '56], selection and editing: Marek Jabłonowski et al, Warsaw 2009.*

## 20 October

**Poland.** At 1 p.m. the Polish-Soviet negotiations come to an end. Khrushchev expresses his dissatisfaction with the attitude of the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party. Nonetheless, the Soviet delegation drops the demands with which it had come to Warsaw and leaves for Moscow at 7 a.m.



Warsaw,  
20 October 1956.  
Student rally in  
the Great Hall of  
Warsaw Techni-  
cal University in  
connection with  
the VIII Plenum  
of the Central  
Committee  
of the Polish  
United Workers'  
Party.

**Nikita Khrushchev:**

*We leave with a sense of anxiety. We are responsible not just for our own country but for the politics of the entire Socialist bloc. [...] The strengthening of the Polish People's Republic is a joy not just for the Polish nation but also for us. Yet now they have spat in our face – and unjustly so.*

**Warsaw, 20 October**

- ➔ *Dokumenty centralnych władz Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej marzec-listopad '56 [Documents of the central authorities of the Polish United Workers' Party, March – November '56], selection and editing: Marek Jabłonowski et al, Warsaw 2009.*

**Poland.** Once the Soviet leadership returns to Moscow, the movement of troops headed for Warsaw is halted. At the Plenum, Gomułka gives a programme presentation which contains criticism of the cult of the individual and of the economic policies of the bygone era. He declares himself in favour of a diverse road to Socialism. Student and workers' delegations arrive in the Central Committee to express their support for changes in personnel. Over 20,000 people gather in the Technical University.

### Jerzy Stempowski in a letter to Jerzy Giedroyc:

*I visited Radio Free Europe which was at constant boiling point due to the events in Poland. [...] What I heard there filled me with immense dread. It would seem that the situation in Poland has broken loose and nobody can control it any longer. Apparently, the Poles were being encouraged to resist by Mao Tse-tung, who had recently been visited by Ochab. Optimists take comfort from this information, just as if everything was clear-cut and Mao Tse-tung's words were as good as gold, and not just an attempt at creating an abcès de fixation [French, here: diversion] to relieve the Manchurian border. Many people in Warsaw delude themselves that the situation between Moscow and the West will not tolerate a new Soviet occupation of Poland. They do not realise that [...] the situation in the West is actually encouraging Khrushchev to occupy Warsaw. All would be well if the Warsaw opposition had some idea of what it could achieve, without exposing Poland to a new calamity.*

**Bern, 21 October**

- Jerzy Giedroyc, Jerzy Stempowski, *Listy 1946-1969 [Letters 1946-1969]*, part 1, Warsaw 1998.

### Jan Olszewski, lawyer, member of the editorial team of "Po Prostu":

*Each of us probably had in our minds the worst possible connotations [...]. After all, this was still the 1944 generation, [the generation of the Warsaw Uprising]. Feverishly, I began to organise various venues in the town which were to serve as contact points, or as safe-houses for those who were most at risk. I do not know whether we referred to it as such but it was preparation for underground work – should the Soviets launch some sort of intervention and the authorities be taken over by some sort of Soviet puppets.*

**Warsaw**

- Jan Olszewski, *Czas "Po Prostu" [The time of "Po Prostu"]*, Karta Issue no. 77, 2013.

## 21 October

**Poland.** Final day of the Plenum. The Central Committee elects a new Politburo. It does not contain the politicians most associated as exponents of Soviet influence. Konstanty Rokossowski, nominated as a candidate by the "Natolin" faction, is unsuccessful. Władysław Gomułka is elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party.

### Jan Józef Szczepański:

*We underwent a quiet revolution, or perhaps it was a skillfully prepared coup d'état. Today, Gomułka became the First Secretary of the Central Committee. [...] Pro-Gomułka rallies take place throughout the country. They differ from previous events of this type in that the demands are carried out with conviction. There are, apparently, similar events in Hungary.*

**Kraków, 21 October**

- Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945-1956 [Diary 1945-1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 2009.

### Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz, poet, writer and literary critic:

*As I listened to Gomułka's speech [...], I was laughing. That's because I already knew that they are lying, that a new fiddle was just beginning. I did not believe a single word [...]. This was a very fresh awareness and very cynical and, therefore, even quite regrettable – particularly as people succumbed to it at the time, both young people and intellectuals succumbed to it.*

**Łódź, 21 October**

- *Nieśmiertelny Stalin i złowieszcze więzienie nudy. Rozmowa z Jarosławem Markiem Rymkiewiczem (23 March 1985) [Immortal Stalin and the ominous prison of boredom. Conversation with Marek Rymkiewicz]*, Jacek Trznadel, *Hańba domowa. Rozmowy z pisarzami [Domestic shame. Conversation with writers]*, Lublin 1990.

Warsaw,  
21 October 1956.  
Queuing for  
newspapers.



MARIAN SOKOŁOWSKI / PAP

**Extract from draft notes made by Vladimir Malin, Head of the General Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, from a meeting of the Praesidium of the Central Committee:**

*Taking into account the current situation, we have to resign from armed intervention and to arm ourselves with patience.*

**Moscow, 21 October**

- ➔ Aleksander Orzechow, *Polska w 1956 roku widziana z Kremla i Starego Placu [Poland in 1956, seen from the Kremlin and the [Central Committee on] Staraya Square]*, in: *Polski Październik 1956 w polityce światowej [Polish October 1956 in world politics]*, ed. Jan Rowiński, Warsaw 2006.

**Zhou Enlai, Premier of the Chinese Communist Party:**

*The Chinese Communist Party supported the stance taken by the Polish United Workers' Party on 21 October, after the VIII Plenum had already taken its own decision. The main achievement, therefore, belongs to our Polish comrades. The Chinese Communist Party merely had a stabilising influence.*

**Warsaw**

- ➔ *Notatka z rozmów przeprowadzonych w dniach 11 i 12 stycznia 1957 r. między delegacjami Komunistycznej Partii Chin i PZPR [Note from talks on 11th and 12th January 1957 between delegates of the Chinese Communist Party and the Polish United Workers' Party]*, in: Andrzej Werblan, *Rozmowy Władysława Gomułki z Zhou Enlaiem w 1957 r. [Władysław Gomułka's talks with Zhou Enlai in 1957]*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1997, R. 29, z. 4.

**22 October**

**Poland.** Prosecutor's office drops charges against participants in the Poznań incidents and revokes sentences. Finally, only those judgments made against the three participants in a lynching of a Corporal in the State Security Force are upheld.

**Jan Nowak-Jeziorański:**

*Instead of the workers, it was the authorities who found themselves in the dock. During the court summing-up speeches, hypotheses about some sort of conspiracy were put forward, as well as accusations concerning the hooligan-like nature of the demonstration. Only a few sentences were passed – the sentences were quite mild.*

**Munich, 22 October**

- ➔ Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, *Wojna w eterze. Wspomnienia 1948–1956 [War in the radio waves, memoirs 1948–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 1991.

**Hungary.** Students from Budapest, Miskolc, Pecs and Sopron join MEFESZ [Hungarian Federation of University and College Students' Associations]. They set down their demands and call for a further day of demonstrations of solidarity in the streets of Budapest.

**Béla Lipták, student:**

*The meeting began normally. Everyone says his or her piece, as in a theatre – we don't even pay much attention [...] Some sort of commotion breaks out next to the platform. Those who had been half asleep suddenly wake up, conversation dies out. [...] Our attention becomes concentrated and then a voice is raised over the clamour: "I represent the Szeged branch of MEFESZ, give me the microphone." [...] The same thought occurred to everyone: the boy's gone mad! At best he'll be thrown out of the university, they might even jail him... Good Lord, that one is out of his mind, too! – I thought to myself as Imi Mécs, who was sitting in the row in front of me, began to clap...*

*The entire hall is in uproar... Reporters appear, cameras click and whirl, spotlights are switched on, the tough voice of the lad from Szeged fills the air: "Technical University students! Hungarians! I bring you news from the students of Szeged and from the Poles who are studying there! You are being double-crossed! Today, the wind of freedom blows throughout Poland ...". And he begins to read out the demands of the students from Szeged; suddenly his voice seems to break, he is almost in tears and then we hear him haltingly, unmelodiously begin to sing the Hungarian national anthem. It was like throwing petrol on a fire – the anthem reverberated throughout the hall and when we finished singing, the students who stood there impassively, expectantly – their faces radiant, their eyes wet with tears – were transformed into another breed.*

**Budapest, 22 October**

- ➔ *Béla Lipták, Amiről kevés szó esett. Adalékok a Budapesti Műszaki Egyetem 1956 októberi eseményeihez [Rarely mentioned. A trigger to the events of October 1956 at the Technical University of Budapest]*, Budapest 1992.

**Demands set out during a rally of students from Budapest Technical University:**

- 1. We demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet units from Hungary [...].*
- 3. We demand that a new Government be constituted, led by Imre Nagy, and the immediate sacking from their posts of the criminals of the Stalinist era and of Rákosi's régime. [...]*
- 5. We demand universal, equal, secret and multi-party elections to a new National Assembly. We demand recognition of workers' right to strike.*

Budapest,  
22 October 1956.  
Students of  
Budapest Techni-  
cal University  
march, carrying  
Hungarian and  
Polish flags.



9. We demand complete revision of the norms operating in industry and an urgent and radical overhaul of wages for workers and salaries for white-collar employees. [...]

11. We demand a new review of all economic and political trials by independent tribunals and the release and rehabilitation of all those who have been unfairly condemned. [...]

12. We demand complete freedom of speech and expression. [...]

15. The students of Budapest's Technical Universities express their total solidarity with the workers and the young people of Warsaw and Poland in their strivings for independence. [...]

This resolution came into being in the dawning of a new era in Hungarian history, on 22 October 1956, in the hall of the Technical University and on the initiative of several thousand young Hungarians who loved their country.

**Budapest, 22 October**

➔ Elektronikus Könyvtár (Hungarian Digital Library), <http://mek.oszk.hu/01900/01937/html/szerviz/dokument/bme16ps.htm> [dostęp: 07.07.2017].

## 23 October

**Hungary.** A demonstration takes place in Budapest; it calls for support for the changes taking place in Poland. In the evening, tens of thousands of people demonstrate outside the Parliament building, where they are addressed by Imre Nagy. A statue of Stalin is demolished. The first shots are fired – outside the radio headquarters, functionaries of the State Security Forces (ÁVH) fire at the crowds. Within a few hours the rebellion spreads throughout the city.

### **George Gömöri, Polish language and literature specialist:**

*It was only a quarter to three and yet it already seemed as if the whole of Budapest had taken to the streets. [...] It was a lovely, peaceful October day, with flags barely fluttering in the wind [...]. I put on an organiser's badge and took off my tie. The sky was blue, people talked to each other with an indolent expectancy, in the distance someone played a Polish patriotic song on a trumpet. It was now five to three. Far more students had arrived than we expected. We were ready to go. I ran to the head of the procession and it moved off.*

*This was a heart stopping moment – I cannot think of any other words to describe it. Hardly had we moved off than people in the windows of neighbouring buildings began to clap and cheer. After the first slogans chanted by the crowd, the clapping intensified. "Freedom! Independ-*



Budapest,  
23 October 1956.  
Demonstrators  
demolish a  
statue of Joseph  
Stalin.



ence!" and "Polish-Hungarian friendship!", then "We demand a new leadership!" [...].

Józef Bem Square was packed tight. [...] As we sang the national anthem, I suddenly noticed the characteristic face of [the Jewish novelist, Tibor] Déry near the pediment of the statue. A man of small stature and wearing glasses, pushed his way through behind Déry. I realised that he must be [Adam] Ważyk, whose arrival in Budapest that morning had been announced on the radio. "Let Ważyk speak," I yelled.

Budapest, 23 October

➔ George Gömöri, *Z dziennika naocznego świadka* [From the diary of a direct witness], "Kultura" Issue no. 10, 1966.

**Adam Ważyk, *Qui tacent, clamant* [They who are silent, shout]:**

*I was with you that day when,  
Beneath the statue of Bem,  
You flew the Hungarian and Polish flags.  
I know not who was wounded, or who is no longer with us,  
Nor when the voices stilled and the fires broke out.*

*Your voice, Tibor Déry, at that hour of turmoil  
Asked me on the 'phone whether I was safe,  
And I heard that voice from the parliament building,  
As it broke in the air like a last cry.*

*We, who were history's conscience, are silent,  
And now this mute voice is the 'raison d'état'...*

➔ Adam Ważyk, *Qui tacent, clamant*, "Nowa Kultura", Issue no. 48, 24 November 1956.

**Pius Zimándi, writer, educator:**

*People's bravery is beyond anything we have imagined until now. To my left someone speaks out loud: "I've had my fill of keeping silent for the last three years!" He had probably been imprisoned or interned. [...] On my right, a grey-haired man with a reddening face, shouts: "Russians go home!" Nothing happens to him. Until recently, he would have been jailed for a couple of years for those words. [...]*

*You can see that, for these people, this is a matter of great import. United, they crowd here; some wear ribbons in the national colours – men, women, old people and youngsters, simple people and intellectuals. The Communists have, indeed, managed to achieve national unity!*

Budapest, 23 October

➔ Pius Zimándi, *A forradalom éve. Krónika 1956-ból* [The year of revolution. Chronicle of 1956], Budapest 1992.

Budapest,  
23 October 1956.  
Demonstrators  
rally round the  
statue of Józef  
Bem, a 19th  
Century Polish  
and Hungarian  
national hero.

### Istvan Angyal, one of the leaders of the Uprising:

*In the firelight, we could see uniformed figures with bayonets standing at the corner of Bródy and Pushkin Streets. We could not see clearly [...] how many there were, what uniforms they wore or what their intentions were.*

*We formed a line, ten or twelve people, arm-in-arm. [...] As we approached to a distance of some five to six steps, the officer gave a command "Fix bayonets!" We unbuttoned our shirts and shouted: "Here, aim here!" Continuing to sing, we walked on. Now the officer commanded: "Fire!" and shots rang out, the elderly man standing next to me fell. The rest of us intermingled with the soldiers and they could not shoot for fear of hitting one of their own. We told them not to shoot at us because we are people just like they are and that among us they might find their own mothers – and then they would be spilling their own blood. They answered, saying they were duty bound to carry out orders and that regulations did not permit them to accept orders from enemies of the people.*

Budapest, 23 October

- Istvan Angyal, *Angyal Istvan saját kezű vallomása [István Angyal's handwritten statements]*, Budapest 1991.

**Poland.** Marian Spychalski replaces Kazimierz Witaszewski (known as 'General Cosh') as Deputy Minister of Defence. This satisfies attitudes among the military – resolutions passed by mass meetings in individual units demand far-reaching changes: removal of Rokossovski, rehabilitation of unjustly condemned officers and settlement of the question of Soviet advisors. A National Catholic Progressive Intelligentsia Club is established. This community declares its support for Władysław Gomułka.

### Tadeusz Mazowiecki:

*It was important to give support to what had happened: this breakthrough must come and it has to be supported; this is not a moment for arguments, this breakthrough must be defended at all costs.*

Warsaw

- Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Zygmunt Skórzyński, *Historia nie tylko złudzeń: Październik 56 [A History – not just of illusions: October 56] in: Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsządek [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth, sensibility]*, ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

Budapest, 23 October 1956. Demonstrators outside parliament. Banners with portrait of Imre Nagy, and slogans: "Polish-Hungarian Friendship".



24 October

**Hungary.** The first Soviet tanks enter the city before 4 a.m. Units of the Red Army meet with resistance by several thousands of armed Hungarians – pupils, students, workers and soldiers. The insurgents take over the radio building and broadcasts are made from the parliament building. The Hungarian Army remains mostly passive although some units do occasionally take part in pacifying disorder in various other towns. The revolution spreads to smaller communities but, on the whole, does not result in armed conflict. Imre Nagy takes over the post of Premier which, in accordance with the plans of the Party leadership and the Soviets, should calm the situation.

#### Imre Nagy in a radio broadcast made at 12.10 p.m.:

##### *People of Budapest!*

*[...] A government led by Communists and with the support of the Hungarian people has every chance of carrying out our political programme. This, as you know, includes a wide-ranging democratisation of Hungarian public life, the realisation of a Hungarian road to Socialism, which would suit our national temperament, and a substantial improvement in living conditions for the working peoples. However, in order that we may start working on this programme together with you, we need to have order, discipline and peace. The enemy elements*



*which have intruded upon the peaceful demonstrations of the young people have misled many honest working people and have turned them against democracy and the rule of the people.*

*[...] Trust us – we have learned from the mistakes of the past and we will lead our nation to success!*

#### **Budapest, 24 October**

→ “Népújság”, 25 October 1956; *A forradalom hangja [The voice of revolution]*, compiled by László Varga, Budapest 1989.

**Poland.** An enthusiastically welcomed Gomułka makes a speech to 300,000 people gathered in Defilad Square in Warsaw. Despite the attitude of the public, he calls for an end to rallies and demonstrations, fearing that an unrestrained movement might be beyond Party control. The speech coincides with nationwide demonstrations by many thousands of participants; these gradually begin to die out following Gomułka’s speech.

#### **Władysław Gomułka in a speech at a rally in Warsaw:**

*We have received Comrade Khrushchev’s assurance that Soviet troops in Poland will return to the places in which they are stationed within two days, and will remain there on the strength of international agreements, as part of the Warsaw Pact. [...]*

*Comrades! Time is of the essence. The Party must begin to resolve the difficult, everyday matters of our economy and of the state.*

*Today, we turn to the working peoples of Warsaw and the entire nation with an appeal for an end to rallies and demonstrations! It is now time to return to our working routine, enlivened by belief and a conviction that a Party allied with the working class and the nation will lead Poland along a new road to Socialism.*

#### **Warsaw, 24 October**

→ “Trybuna Ludu” Issue no. 298, 25 October 1956.

#### **Wiktor Nowakowski, Managing Director of the “Produkcja” Workers Cooperative:**

*Today, I am taking part in an enormous rally in front of the Palace of Culture. Gomułka is making a speech. The audience’s reaction appears to be in order; for instance, when he mentions Khrushchev’s promise that Soviet troops will return to their bases, there is silence. Here and there a burst of applause – a sign of satisfaction. Mostly, though, there is silence which signifies surprise as to why it was that the Soviet*

Budapest,  
October 1956.  
Insurgents take  
to the streets of  
the city.

troops had left their bases in the first place and made for Warsaw. Even a complete idiot now understands that, up till now, there could have been no question of sovereignty.

Warsaw, 24 October

→ Wiktor E. Nowakowski, *Okruchy systemu [The crumbs of a system]*, Karta 76, 2013.

### Jacek Kuroń, leader of Warsaw Technical University's Association of Polish Youth [ZMP]:

*We said: and that's how he ends the revolution, he's the boss now. [...] After the rally, we returned to the College Council of the ZMP. We were all furious. Although all of us were totally worn out by all those rallies, his "an end to demonstrations" infuriated us. Was that all he had to tell us?*

Warsaw, 24 October

→ Jacek Kuroń, *Wiara i wina [Faith and Fault]*, Warsaw 1990.

### Stanisław Kuziński, II Secretary of the Warsaw Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party:

*After the official termination of the rally, its participants divided into two groups. The first was extremely unruly and [...] Goździk [...] led it away to Constitution Square and thence towards Warsaw Technical University, where it slowly and spontaneously dispersed. The second group, made up of several thousand people, moved off along the Aleje Ujazdowskie, intending to shower the Soviet Embassy with stones. That would have constituted an attempt to undermine the understanding agreed with such difficulty with the Soviet delegation. It was then that [...] the groups of workers gathered in the vicinity of the Warsaw Committee in Aleje Róż and Szopen Street proved useful. Hollering unrepeatable slogans, they intermingled with the crowds and dispersed them completely.*

Warsaw, 24 October

→ Stanisław Kuziński, *Zwrot '56 z perspektywy Komitetu Warszawskiego [About-turn '56 seen from the perspective of the Warsaw Committee]*, "Dziś" Issue no. 10, 1996.

### Jan Józef Szczepański:

*The tragic Uprising in Budapest.*

*Today there were two demonstrations reflecting current attitudes. The rally with Gomułka in Warsaw, imbued with authentic enthusiasm and tactical speeches which the audience understands perfectly, and in the evening a demonstration outside the Hungarian Embassy in support of the Uprising – strictly condemned in a radio communiqué. Gomułka balances on the tight rope with remarkable skill. [...]*



WŁADYSŁAW SŁAWNY / FORUM

*The atmosphere of national degeneration has disappeared. For a few days now, the people are not the same as previously. In the evening, I saw groups of typical 'flower people' [young people in colourful clothes] and hooligans in the city parks – they were enthusiastically discussing recent events. People need real fodder for their emotions. Hopefully, the situation will not push us back into a fictitious world.*

Kraków, 24 October

→ Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945–1956 [Diary 1945–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 2009.

Warsaw,  
24 October  
1956. Władysław  
Gomułka makes  
a speech during  
a rally in Defilad  
Square.

**Poland.** The Sejm [Polish parliament] brings in a new electoral system. Despite the current system which turned voting into an empty ritual, in practice it is possible to have more candidates than seats. The elections, which were initially meant to take place in December, are now planned for 20 January 1957.

25 October

**Hungary.** ÁVH State Security units carry out a massacre of demonstrators (almost two hundred dead) outside the Parliament building. With Moscow's approval, Gerő is replaced by János Kádár, who had been imprisoned during the Stalinist era. Nagy demands the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

**Extract from a report by Anastas Mikoyan and Mikhail Suslov for the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party:**

*Comrade Imre Nagy asked us to increase the number of our troops in the Budapest area, particularly infantry. Comrade Malinin promised our Hungarian Comrades that we will increase the number of our troops in order to bring back order in the Budapest area. [...] Exchange of fire in the capital is unceasing. Fire from roof tops and upper floors is returned by Soviet units with machine guns, Szpagin assault pistols, and often with guns mounted on armoured vehicles.*

**Budapest, 25 October**

→ *A "Jelcin-dossier". Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról ["The Yeltsin Dossier". Soviet documents from 1956], transl. Éva Gál et al, Budapest 1993.*

**Tibor Pákh, lawyer, translator:**

*I was wounded outside Parliament [...]. This wasn't random firing but a slow, consistent massacre. [...] There was no escape. [...] Once the*



*firing had quietened down a bit, I took shelter with some other people in the arcade of the southern entrance to Parliament. The arcade was full. I banged on the doors asking that we be allowed inside because the firing was now coming from Akadémia Street. [...] When the firing abated, we again tried to escape as we were standing directly in front of an armoured car. And it was then that a shot fired from it, hit me. For a moment, I lay among the dead but then managed to escape [...].*

**Budapest, 25 October**

→ Interview with Tibor Pákh conducted by Eszter Balázs, 1997–1998, OSZK 1956th Institute – OHA, No. 690.

**Pavel Tigríd, Czech writer:**

*The steel caterpillar tracks of Soviet tanks moved around the cobble streets in the final act of that tragedy while we in Czechoslovakia didn't even raise a finger. Whilst people in Communist Poland organised collections of money for medication and donations of blood for the Hungarian insurgents, the Czechs placed bets on match results and in Bratislava they attended hockey matches.*

**New York**

→ Pavel Tigríd, *Marx na Hradčanech [Marx in the Hradčany district]*, Brno 2001.

**German Democratic Republic.** Speaking to Ernest Wollweber, Minister of State Security, Walter Ulbricht, the First Secretary of the SED, accuses the Polish security apparatus of not taking any steps to prevent Gomułka's return to power.

26 October

**Poland.** Gomułka's delegates, Władysław Bieńkowski and Zenon Kiszko, visit Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in Komańcza, where he has been interned since September 1953. They bring him news of the First Secretary's decision to release him.

**Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński:**

*At 9 a.m. the Deputy Minister of Justice, Zenon Kliszko, and deputy Władysław Bieńkowski, arrived in Komańcza on the orders of Władysław Gomułka [...]. They described to me the social and economic situation in the country, as well as both the internal and external political situation. All these factors indicate that the country needs to regain peace and calm as quickly as possible. Władysław Gomułka be-*

Budapest,  
October 1956.  
Inhabitants  
flee from the  
fighting between  
insurgents and  
the Red Army.



lieves that, in terms of the Church-State relationship, it is the current situation in which the Primate of Poland finds himself which arouses the most serious concerns of the public. They have, therefore, been delegated by the Party Secretary to hear out what the Reverend Father has to say. I answered: "For three years I have been of the opinion that the place of the Primate of Poland is in Warsaw."

**Komańcza, 26 October**

→ Stefan Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne [Notes from imprisonment]*, Warsaw 2006.

## October

**German Democratic Republic.** To date, some 21,000 victims of repression during the past era have been reprieved or pardoned (although most of them were former Nazis and not political prisoners). Among them are SED politicians, including Anton Ackermann, who was once in support of the German road to Socialism, and the former Minister of Justice, Max Fechner, arrested as a result of his

opposition to the repression of participants in the 1953 workers' demonstrations.

## 28 October

**Hungary.** An armistice is declared. The government recognises that the current events are democratic and national by nature, rather than counter-revolutionary.

### Extract from conditions set by the Corvin köz insurgent group:

*To the Command of the Soviet Army*

*[...] Only part of the ÁVH State Security forces and some of the Soviet troops stationed in Budapest are attacking us. We scorn those Hungarian politicians who – for the sake of strengthening their own positions – have turned to you for armed support. To us, the ÁVH functionaries who provoked an armed revolt and the unnecessary shedding of blood are perpetrators of fratricide. But it is you whom we are unable to understand – after all, we are not an external enemy but only an oppressed nation which is justly demanding its rights. [...]*

*Why do you fight against us? Why is Russian blood spilt for reasons of our own internal matters [...] Leave this battle to us and we will win our rights, rights which should apply to every human being.*

*[...] We demand that the Soviet Army discontinue its hostile action, withdraw to its own bases and leave the territory of our country by 31 December 1956.*

**Budapest, 28 October**

→ Gergely Pongrácz, *Corvin köz – 1956*, Budapest 1989.

## End of October

**Poland.** End of October. Radio broadcast appeal for blood donors for wounded Hungarians. Almost 800 litres of blood are donated by several thousand people; medication and food are also collected. Throughout Poland, Committees for Aid for Hungarians are set up, and demonstrations of solidarity are organised. The Polish press openly publishes information about the events taking place on the Danube – although this can also be interpreted as a warning to the Polish public as to the consequences of fermenting emotions.

Warsaw,  
October 1956.  
Polish Primate,  
Cardinal Stefan  
Wyszyński after  
release from  
internment.



Budapest, October–November 1956. Unloading containers of blood donated by inhabitants of Poznań.

**Extract from an article entitled *W obliczu tragedii węgierskiej [In the face of the Hungarian tragedy]:***

*The events taking place in Hungary come as a shock to the conscience of every honest Pole. The fratricidal war taking place over many days and the heavy casualties which it brings, have also brought mourning to our own country. Many of us pose ourselves the dramatic question: how is it that with the existence of a people's power, a sizeable portion of the Hungarian peoples is taking to arms against that very rule of law? [...]*

*The conservative, Stalinist elements in the leadership have been hampering the process of democratisation to the very last moment. The peaceful demonstrations by the young people of Budapest who were expressing their solidarity with the changes taking place in Poland and putting forward similar demands for Hungary, were addressed in harsh and unacceptable terms by the former First Secretary, Ernő Gerő, who chastised the demonstrators for their so-called "reactionary sentiments".*

**Warsaw, 28 October**

→ "Trybuna Ludu" Issue no. 301, 28 October 1956.

## 29 October

**Poland.** The Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party sends out an appeal to the Hungarians – published in the Hungarian press. Gomułka and Cyrankiewicz, both signatories of the document, criticise Gerő and express their support for Nagy and, among others, for the demand that Soviet troops be withdrawn from Hungary.

**Extract from *An Appeal by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party to our Hungarian Brothers:***

*Hungarian Brothers! You and we are on the same side, on the side of freedom and Socialism. [...] May peace reign in Hungary – peace and the unity of the nation which are so essential for your realisation of the wide-ranging programme of democratisation, development and Socialism which your government of National Unity has announced.*

**Warsaw, 29 October**

→ "Trybuna Ludu" Issue no. 302, 29 October 1956.

## 30 October

**Hungary.** At 7.20 a.m., the Ministry of Defence broadcasts news of the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Budapest. A new government is set up. It is composed not only of Communists but also of representatives of the other political parties which have emerged in recent days. It can be said that a multi-party system has been reborn in Hungary. Insurgents attack the headquarters of the Budapest Communist Party Committee and kill State Security functionaries in the building. Universally hated AVH State Security functionaries are subjected to lynchings at this time, both in Budapest and in a few other towns. The Primate of Hungary, Cardinal József Mindszenty, is released. He

Budapest,  
30 October 1956.  
Cardinal József  
Mindszenty with  
the leader of  
the insurgents  
following his  
release.



KEYSTONE / PAP



has been imprisoned since 1948 under a life sentence. Thousands of people sentenced in political trials are also released from prison.

#### **Gyula Csics, school pupil:**

*Insurgents hanged two secret policemen [ÁVH members] by their feet on a tree. One was wearing a militia uniform, the other was dressed in the uniform of a colonel of an armoured unit. [...] Both had a ribbon in their buttonholes to confuse the insurgents [...].*

*By the evening, the radio was already broadcasting as Radio Free Kossuth and it announced that a National Guard had been established and that [Cardinal] Mindszenty had been released.*

**Budapest, 30 October**

→ Gyula Csics, *Węgierska rewolucja 1956. Pamiętnik dwunastolatka [The Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Diary of a twelve-year old]*, Warsaw 2016.

#### **Andrzej Kijowski:**

*This evening there was news of further escalation of fighting and of Soviet troop reinforcements. Let's wait and see – this could end very badly. Or, perhaps, very well. It's possible that these Polish and Hungarian revolutions are the price we have to pay to avoid war... The Russians will finally realise that they are completely alone. So, what next? Either the conservative wing, headed by Molotov, will come to the fore in the USSR and then we can expect anything – including an invasion by the Red Army – or the liberal wing, headed by [Georgij] Malenkov will win – and then things might improve. [...]*

*People walk around the streets, sporting Hungarian rosettes in their lapels; outside the university there is a collection point for medicine, as well as Hungarian flags and posters designed by students of the Academy of Fine Arts. At the corner of Aleje [Jeruzolimskie] and Nowy Świat Street there is a Hungarian flag on the lamp-post and a poster showing a chain broken by a blood stain.*

**Warsaw, 30 October**

→ Andrzej Kijowski, *Dziennik 1955–1969 [Diary 1955–1969]*, Kraków 1998.

**Poland.** Meeting between Gomułka and representatives of the Catholic intelligentsia. A decision is taken to bring back the legitimate editorial team of “Tygodnik Powszechny”, which had been dismissed in 1953 in favour of Bolesław Piasecki's faction. The First Secretary also agrees to the publication of the Catholic monthly “Znak”.

#### **Jerzy Zawieyski, Chairman of the National Catholic Progressive Intelligentsia Club:**

*[Gomułka] spoke to us as a Pole, not as a man of the Party. First, he spoke of the Soviet Union – saying that the most important thing was to free ourselves from its interference and that this had already been done and that we can now rule our country ourselves. It does not mean, however, that the danger is past and any anti-Soviet action is an action against Poland. He expressed concern that Catholic young people are intemperate and put forward provocative demands at rallies [...]. He asked that we help the government in calming down and stopping intemperate disruptive moves. He gladly welcomed our readiness to cooperate in the rebuilding of Poland and noted that he was pinning great faith on such cooperation from the Catholic community.*

**Warsaw, 30 October**

→ Jerzy Zawieyski, *Dzienniki [Diaries]*, vol. 1, Warsaw 2011.

Budapest,  
October 1956.  
The body of an  
executed AVH  
State Security  
functionary.



Budapest, October–November 1956. Destruction of Soviet propaganda material.



## 1 November

**Hungary.** Imre Nagy announces Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and its neutrality, and he turns to the United Nations for guarantees. At about 10 p.m., the radio broadcasts a speech by János Kádár. Even as the speech is being broadcast, Kádár is no longer in Budapest. He has made a secret journey to the USSR. At a meeting with Soviet leaders, he agrees the setting up of a new Hungarian leadership. In the course of the next few days, Nikita Khrushchev informs the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries of the decision to pacify the Hungarian Revolution by force.

### János Kádár in his speech:

*Hungarian workers! Peasants! Intelligentsia!*

*[...] The illustrious uprising of our nation has freed Hungary from the yoke of Rákosi's rule. It has won freedom for the people and independence for the country, without which there is not – nor can there be – Socialism. We can say with all surety that the people who are responsible for the idealistic and structural preparation and direction of the revolution, come from your own ranks. [...]*

*We are honest with you. This national uprising has found itself at a crossroads. Either the Hungarian democratic parties find enough determination to strengthen their victories or we shall be facing an open counter-revolution.*

**Budapest, 1 November**

- "Népszabadság", 2 November 1956, quote from: *Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból, 1956 [From the documents of a certain revolution by the people, 1956]*, selection: Tamás G. Korányi, Budapest 1989.

## 2 November

**Poland.** The Politburo of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party issues an appeal, in which it criticises the Soviet aggression on Hungary and indicates that the crisis can be overcome by the Hungarians themselves. Appeals for calm are addressed to the people of Poland.

### Jan Józef Szczepański:

*An atmosphere of panic. In the morning, every half hour the radio broadcast the Central Committee's call for calm. Shops were emptied as people stocked up with food. Huge queues outside the shops. In*



*Hungary, Communists are being massacred – it would seem that the events there have gone beyond the control of any authority. [...]*

*The UN has lost all credibility. The abomination of that naked political brute force has the feel of polluted air. There is no-one to turn to.*

**Kraków, 2 November**

- Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945–1956 [Diary 1945–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 2009.

Budapest,  
1 November  
1956. Imre Nagy  
announces  
Hungarian  
neutrality.

## 3 November

**Hungary / USSR.** Members of the Hungarian delegation, led by the Minister of Defence, Pála Maléter, who were to have negotiated the terms of the withdrawal of the Red Army with the Soviets are arrested by them instead, in the Soviet Command HQ in Tököl, Hungary. In Moscow, at a meeting of the Praesidium of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, a counter-government is set up, led by János Kádár and Ferenc Münnich.



#### Cardinal József Mindszenty in a radio broadcast:

*Our situation is dependent on what the 200-million strong Russian empire intends to do with those of its armed forces which find themselves on our territory. According to the radio, these forces are continuing to grow. We are a neutral state and we do not give the Russian empire any excuse for the shedding of blood. [...] One state attacks another when it has itself been attacked. We, however, have not attacked Russia! [...]*

*Everyone in this country should be aware that the battle fought in Hungary was not a revolution but a battle for the nation's liberation. [...] We need new elections – honest elections – in which all political parties can take part. The course of such elections should take place under international supervision.*

**Budapest, 3 November**

- József Mindszenty, *Emlékirataim* [My memoirs], Toronto 1974, quote from: *Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból, 1956* [From the documents of a certain people's uprising, 1956], 1956, selected by: Tamás G. Korányi, Budapest 1989.

#### 4 November

**Hungary.** Commencement of a second Soviet invasion. As in the first, insurgents in Budapest (numbering several thousands), put up armed resistance. At 5.20 a.m., the radio makes its first broadcast of a short declaration by Imre Nagy, which is then repeated many times over in the English, French, German, Russian, Czech and Polish languages. After the broadcast, the Premier and his closest circle take refuge in the Yugoslav embassy.

#### Imre Nagy's message to the UN Secretary General, broadcast by Radio Free Kossuth:

*This is Imre Nagy speaking, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic. Today, at dawn, Soviet units attacked our capital city with the obvious intention of overthrowing Hungary's legal, democratic government. Our forces stood ready to fight. The government remains at its post. This is my message – sent to the people of Hungary and to the whole world.*

**Budapest, 4 November**

- Magyar Távirati Iroda (Hungarian Information Agency), <http://1956.mti.hu/pages/Audio.aspx> [access: 11.07.2017].

Budapest, October–November 1956. Armoured column.

### Olaf Csongovai, student:

*I slept on a table in an office on Tűzoltó Street. At dawn, the lads said that the Russians had returned. I remember that my gut reaction was 'devil take them – couldn't they have waited a few hours; I was in a deep sleep'. [...] We grabbed our weapons.*

*[...] On Berzenczey Street, a unit of Soviet infantry suddenly appeared. I began to fire at them but they didn't even quicken their advance, they just marched calmly towards us. That was a dreadful feeling. Are they not afraid? I fire at them but they don't even fall to the ground, just carry on marching. It was then that I began to feel afraid. Tanks didn't worry me. I felt no fear that they would open fire. But infantry... I was afraid of a massacre – the fact that we would be fighting hand to hand.*

**Budapest, 4 November**

- Interview with Per Olaf Csongovai conducted by László Eörsi, 1992, OSZK 1956th Institute OHA, No. 420.

### Leszek Dzięgiel, ethnologist:

*The, as yet, non-biasé Kraków press published articles which were full of sympathy although, here and there, one could discern a warning tone: see, this is where lack of moderation and sense gets you! The fear that Moscow would invade us, too, on some sort of pretext – it was just waiting for an appropriate gesture, a word or action.*

**Kraków, 4 November**

- Leszek Dzięgiel, *Swoboda na smyczy. Wspomnienia 1946–1956 [Liberty on a lead. Memoirs 1946–1956]*, Kraków 1996.

### Extract from *An Appeal by the Student Revolutionary Committee*:

*We do not wish to share the fate which met our Hungarian brothers. Both inside our country and outside it there are forces which are strong enough to quell our revolution at any moment. It is also a fact that armed forces are ranged along our borders. Logic will not allow us to provide them with any pretext to advance and attack.*

**Kraków, 4/5 November**

- Andrzej Bratkowski, *W Budapeszcie ktoś bliski potrzebował pomocy [In Budapest, someone very close needed help]*, in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsządek [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth, sensibility]*, ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

**Poland.** Conference of Party activists. In his speech, Gomułka promises that members of the Polish United Workers' Party will not be judged on their past actions but on their current attitudes. He thus



MARIO DE BIASI / LEEMAGE / EAST NEWS

Budapest, November 1956. AVH State Security functionary captured by insurgents.

counters the fears of many functionaries that democratisation would lead to a weakening of the position of the Party apparatus.

### Jan Józef Szczepański:

*The tension in Warsaw is difficult to bear. Almost everybody expects the worse to happen any minute. All ideological masks have ceased to have any meaning. Everyone knows that there is just one single, deadly danger. [...] The feeling that our fate lies in the hands of criminal madmen is terrifying.*

*At this time, the feeling of a temporary return to the spheres of the civilised West is almost palpable: if nothing else then at least the fact that we can give vent to our true thoughts, that we are not made of a clay ready for moulding. Students with Hungarian flags in their lapels – such a simple form of expression of moral opinions speaks aloud of the entire chasm which divides us.*

**Warsaw, 4 November**

- Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945–1956 [Diary 1945–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 2009.



### Extract from a letter written by “Anon from Radom”:

By now everyone has surely recovered from the fever of a Polish October revolution. We now see everything in a sober light. So, what is the conclusion? Just as we used to sit in a sealed wagon, choking on the reeking air blowing from Moscow – we still continue to sit there. Let us say that we’ve just managed to dislodge a small plank in the wooden wagon and felt a tiny whiff of fresh air. Those who had not seen everything, just felt it, began to cheer – ‘hurrah!’ They thought the entire door had been opened and you could pass through. They soon learnt that just a single small plank had been prised open and everything is as it used to be, you still have to remain in the wagon. Those who were further back made a big fuss out of nothing. [...]

Where are these changes? [...] I look around keenly, I listen, read and – truth to tell – what is there to applaud?

#### Radom

→ *Księga listów PRL-u [Compendium of letters from the Polish People's Republic], vol. 2, selection and editing: Grzegorz Sołtysiak, Warsaw 2005.*

### 7 November

**Hungary.** At dawn, Soviet combat vehicles take Kádár and his government to the Parliament building. In the afternoon, Kádár’s government is sworn in, although Imre Nagy’s legal government has not resigned. The state administration from before 23 October is reinstated.

#### Gyula Csics:

*Today was to be my twelfth birthday. Today it was not possible to celebrate any birthday because, today, there was also shooting – perhaps not as much but you could hear the shots from afar. [...] I had hardly crossed the road before six tanks drove down it. One of them stood outside our house and opened fire. That’s how several windows in the house were broken.*

*In the afternoon, a terrible battle began. Guns continued to fire. Suddenly news spread round the inhabitants of our building – the Corvin*



OROSZOK  
HAZA!!

ПОШЛИ  
ДОМОЙ!!!

Budapest,  
November 1956.  
Street barricade.  
Slogans in  
Hungarian and  
Russian read:  
"Russians go  
home!! Go back  
home!!"

*[Department Store] was alight. In our house, all buckets and tubs were filled with water, in case the fire spread to our building.*

**Budapest, 7 November**

- Gyula Csics, *Węgierska rewolucja 1956. Pamiętnik dwunastolatka [The Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Diary of a twelve-year old]*, Warsaw 2016.

**Extract from a report by Georgy Zhukov, USSR Minister of Defence:**

*On 9 November, our units continued to liquidate the smaller insurgent groups, disarm former soldiers of the Hungarian Army and confiscate weapons from the local inhabitants. [...] The political situation in the country is improving. In some places, however, hostile elements continue to hamper attempts to bring back order and normality. The situation in Budapest is still complicated, its inhabitants suffer shortages of food supplies and fuel. János Kádár's government, together with the commanders of Soviet units, are issuing orders aimed at providing food supplies for the inhabitants of Budapest.*

**Budapest, 10 November**

- A „Jelcin-dosszié”. *Szovjet dokumentumok 1956-ról [“The Yeltsin Dossier”. Soviet documents from 1956]*, ed. Éva Gál et al, Budapest 1993.

**Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz:**

*We experience days of magnificence and of tragedy, of human depravity and of heroism. Above all, though, disappointment – all the grand slogans of the mighty of this world have turned out to be a lie. Intoxicated by their own power, they are oblivious of everything else – and it is left to the poor and small states, the little nations to try to replace force with the rule of law. But it is always they who suffer. Hapless Hungary, and not just tragically hapless but also exposed to derision, to shame and vilification. A pity on those people who could bear it no longer. [...] Nowhere to turn to – just force, just aggression, just greed... just condemnation of Man to suffering.*

**Stawisko, 10 November**

- Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1956–1963 [Diaries 1956–1963]*, Warsaw 2010.

**11 November**

**Hungary.** The remaining points of resistance by insurgents in the working-class district of Csepel in Budapest are liquidated.

JÁNOS TISCHLER COLLECTION



Budapest, No-  
vember 1956.



WYBORCZA.PL

### 13 November

**Poland.** Konstanty Rokossowski, seen by the country as a representative of Soviet power, is sacked from his post as Minister of Defence in line with demands put forward by many Polish Army units.

### 18 November

**Poland.** Street skirmishes in Bydgoszcz, caused by an attempt by the militia to quieten a fracas outside a cinema. Demonstrators stone the headquarters of the Municipal Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party and demolish equipment used to jam Radio Free Europe broadcasts.

#### **Władysław Gomułka in a speech during a Party conference:**

*Throughout the country, we are faced with many hostile incidents – windows are smashed and Party members are even beaten up. The fact that prosecuting authorities react leniently is an unhealthy sign. We have just faced incidents in Bydgoszcz – acts of provocative hoolii-*

*ganism. This even caused confusion the ranks of our militia. [...] We must not demonstrate any sort of liberalism.*

#### **Warsaw**

→ *Fragmety przemówienia Władysława Gomułki na naradzie I sekretarzy KW PZPR w dniu 23 listopada 1956 w Warszawie [Excerpts from a speech by Władysław Gomułka, at a conference of First Secretaries of the Polish United Workers' Party, on 23 November 1956 in Warsaw], in: 6 lat temu (Kulisy Polskiego Października) [6 years ago. (Backstage during Polish October)], Biblioteka "Kultury", vol. 83, Documents, Paris 1962.*

**USSR / Poland.** The visit to the USSR of Gomułka and other representatives of the new leadership comes to an end. Agreement is reached on the conditions under which Soviet troops are stationed in Poland, on settlement of debts for Polish coal sold to the Soviet Union at discounted prices, and on the matter of repatriation.



JERZY BARANOWSKI / PAP

Bydgoszcz,  
Poland 18  
November 1956.  
Overtured  
wreck of  
25-metre mast  
of Radio Free  
Europe jamming  
device.

Biała Podlaska,  
Poland, 18 No-  
vember 1956.  
Władysław  
Gomułka is  
greeted with  
flowers on his  
return from  
Moscow.



Terespol,  
Poland,  
18 November  
1956. Enthusiastic  
welcome  
for the Polish  
delegation on its  
way back from  
Moscow.

JERZY BARANOWSKI / PAP

**Maria Dąbrowska, writer:**

*Apparently, the negotiations in Moscow went well. [...] Gomułka's return [...] was like a triumphal march which stretched from Terespol (the current border). Crowds lined the railway line, stopping the train even between stations. [...] When they reached Warsaw, the delegation's private carriage was full of flowers, letters, telegrams and... gifts of toys for Gomułka – even cuddly teddy bears and dolls! Everywhere crowds sang: 'Sto lat...' [equivalent: "For he's a jolly good fellow..."].*

**Warsaw, 20 November**

→ Maria Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki powojenne 1945–1965 [Post-war diaries 1945–1965]*, vol. 3, Warsaw 1996.

**Władysław Gomułka in a speech during a Party conference:**

*We have now put these and other matters before the Soviet delegation, before the Soviet government and we told them that we consider them to have been unfairly settled; we told them: give back what's owing to us. [...] We have a right to face the working class and to declare: we did it, nobody else, nobody else could manage to settle these matters. At the same time, Comrades, it must be said that other solutions, other possibilities or any other programme for shaping the political situation in the country than the one our Party puts forward, does not – and cannot – exist.*

**Warsaw**

→ *Fragmenty przemówienia Władysława Gomułki na naradzie I sekretarzy KW PZPR w dniu 23 listopada 1956 w Warszawie [Excerpts from speeches made by Władysław Gomułka at a conference of Province Committee First Secretaries of the Polish United Workers' Party on 23 November 1956 in Warsaw]*, in: *6 lat temu (Kulisy Polskiego Października)*, Biblioteka "Kultury", vol. 83, Documents, Paris 1962.

**19 November**

**Poland.** The Sejm [Parliament] passes an Act on Workers' Councils, giving them wide powers. Its resolutions are an attempt at appeasing the demands of the workers' unions within the interests of the centrally planned economy.

**Lechosław Goździk:**

*What we wanted was clear from the slogans which we used. The most important matter was Poland's sovereignty. Another important point was that we wanted to be in charge in our workplaces – hence the workers' councils. Following the VIII Plenum, these sprang up in large numbers*

*all over the country. Telephones kept ringing, one delegation followed another and we could not keep up in providing everyone with full information. [...] Besides, the authorities were not interested in promoting the workers' councils. [...] After all, in in-house elections, when workers' councils are elected by secret ballot, everyone can vote as they think fit...*

**Warsaw**

→ Lechosław Goździk, *Byliśmy u siebie w domu [We were in our own home]*, in: *Październik 1956. Pierwszy wyłom w systemie. Bunt, młodość, rozsądek [October 1956. The first breakthrough in the system. Revolt, youth, sensibility]*, ed. Stefan Bratkowski, Warsaw 1996.

**21 November**

**Poland.** Influenced by the incidents in Bydgoszcz, the authorities decide to stop devices based in Poland from jamming the broadcasts of western radio stations – including Radio Free Europe.

**Jan Nowak-Jeziorański:**

*Polish broadcasts on Radio Free Europe were jammed by devices located in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. [...] Of course, it was difficult to establish whether this jamming was a form of free-of-charge 'brotherly help', or whether it was funded by the treasury of the Polish People's Republic.*

**Munich, 21 November**

→ Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, *Wojna w eterze. Wspomnienia 1948–1956 [War in the radio waves, memoirs 1948–1956]*, vol. 1, Kraków 1991.



JEZIORANSKI.ORG

Propaganda poster: "Radio Free Europe calling", "Stupid is he who listens with bated breath. Whom does he help? Deathly enemies".



MARIO DE BIASI / MONDADORI PORTFOLIO VIA GETTY IMAGES

## 22 November

**Hungary.** Despite Kádár's guarantee of safe passage to Yugoslavia, after leaving the Yugoslav embassy, Imre Nagy is arrested and transported to Romania.

### Jan Józef Szczepański:

*In the editorial office of "Przekrój", I looked through stacks of foreign journals showing photographs from Hungary. What a shocking sight. Masses of pictures of lynchings of secret policemen. People were quite literally overcome by the hatred which had escalated over many years. [...] Most horrifying was the need for it in this enclosed circle of terror – and it still continues.*

Kraków, 23 November

→ Jan Józef Szczepański, *Dziennik 1945–1956* [Diary 1945–1956], vol. 1, Kraków 2009.

### Jerzy Stempowski in a letter to Jerzy Giedroyc:

*The difference between the fates of Hungarians and of Poles – both of whom are equally tempestuous – seems to evolve from the fact that, in Poland, the Party had a somewhat broader base and it could [...] control the situation, whereas in Hungary the initiative immediately passed to the people, i.e. the anti-Communists who had no idea of the realities of the situation. Nagy, himself, counted on some sort of help or diversion from the West. The tragic question: "What is the UN doing?" was continually repeated in news sent out from Budapest's besieged parliament to Vienna, and it was heard over and over in radio-stations which were still in the hands of the insurgents.*

*A few days ago, I read in "Corriere [della Sera]" an entire indictment against [President of the USA, Dwight] Eisenhower, which quoted his rhetoric on the subject of "liberation" during his first election campaign. These promises had been directed primarily at the Polish community in the US, on whose votes he relied, and yet no Pole gave them any credence. Why, then, did the Hungarians take this rhetoric seriously?*

Bern, 23 November

→ Jerzy Giedroyc, Jerzy Stempowski, *Listy 1946–1969* [Letters 1946–1969], part 1, Warsaw 1998.

Budapest,  
November.  
Insurgents  
dragging the  
body of an AVH  
State Security  
functionary.

29 November

**German Democratic Republic.** The authorities restore the visa requirement – revoked at the beginning of the year – for citizens of other countries in the Soviet bloc, including Poland. The journalist and philosopher, Wolfgang Harich, is arrested on suspicion of a counter-revolutionary plot. Harich was a Communist who had become increasingly critical of the system.

**Extract from an article *Liquidation of a subversive group:***

*According to an announcement by the Prosecutor General of the German Democratic Republic, on 29 November 1956 a group of people were arrested on the orders of the GDR Prosecutor General. The aim of these people, said to be acting in conjunction with western security services, was to undermine and destroy the constitutional order of the German Democratic Republic. The leader of this anti-state group was said to be a certain Dr. Wolfgang Harich, employed as an editor in the Aufbau Publishing House in the democratic sector of Berlin. [...] All the accused – without any exceptions – represented spheres which were hostile towards Socialism and the workers' movement. The political aim of this subversive group was said to be the restoration of a capitalist order in the GDR.*

**Berlin, 25 November**

→ *Staatsfeindliche Gruppe unschädlich gemacht [Liquidation of a subversive group], "Neues Deutschland", 1 December 1956.*

November–December

**Poland.** The process of disintegration of agricultural production cooperatives – often spontaneous, without waiting for relevant decisions – gathers speed. In the six months from the VIII Plenum, their number drops from over 10,000 to around 1,800. At the same time, repatriation of Poles from the USSR continues – by the end of the year some 16,000 people return to Poland. A personnel revolution also takes place with the replacement of many Provincial First Secretaries and with reductions in personnel in the Party and in the Ministry of the Interior.

**Jerzy Giedroyc in a letter to Jerzy Stempowski:**

*We are entering the era of the personal dictatorship of Gomułka. Gomułka has virtually eliminated the Communist Party. [...] The big-*

*gest advantage in the present situation is the unique coincidence in key personae, namely the trio of: Gomułka, Wyszyński and Cyrankiewicz. This appears to be a good team. The émigré community (by that I mean the political groups) no longer seems relevant and does not stand a chance today. Wyszyński has no plans for a Christian political organisation.*

**Maisons-Laffitte, 25 November**

→ Jerzy Giedroyc, Jerzy Stempowski, *Listy 1946–1969 [Letters 1946–1969]*, part 1, Warsaw 1998.

GDR, 1956.  
Wolfgang Harich  
during a discus-  
sion.



JULSTEIN BILD VIA GETTY IMAGES



## 2 December

**Poland.** The end of the Congress of the Association of Polish Writers. Antoni Słonimski is elected Chairman.

### Mieczysław Jastrun:

*At the end of the Congress, I was delegated to approach the Central Committee, together with [Maria] Dąbrowska and [Jerzy] Zawieyski in relation to a letter from Hungarian writers who were living in exile in Vienna. We were received by Gomułka, himself. [...] He speaks of two opposing blocs and gives us to understand that the West gave the Soviets a free hand within borders governed by treaties.*

Warsaw, 4 December

→ Mieczysław Jastrun, *Dziennik 1955–1981 [Diary 1955–1981]*, Kraków 2002.

## 8 December

**Hungary.** In the town of Salgótarján, near the Czechoslovak border, security forces attack miners protesting against repressions aimed at members of the local workers' councils. At least 46 people are killed.

## 10 December

**Poland.** A national conference of the Polish Scouting movement decides on restoration of the pre-war Polish Scouting Association [ZHP]. Aleksander Kamiński, one of the underground commanders of the 'Szare Szeregi' [lit. Grey Scout Ranks] during the German occupation, is elected Chairman of the Supreme Scouting Council.

### Zofia Zakrzewska, Head of the ZHP, in a discussion during the conference:

*The breakthrough in the work of the scouting movement will be all the more meaningful in the face of increased criticism of the mistakes made in the scouting movement in recent years – and for many of us these are our very own mistakes. [...] The XX Conference has shown us, the educators, the causes of our disasters and of our failures in our work with young people. Like a searchlight, it has focused on that*

*which we were previously unable to see clearly. It has shown us that education based on lies is just not possible.*

Łódź, 10 December

→ *Krajowy Zjazd Działaczy Harcerskich w Łodzi. Uchwały, referaty, głosy w dyskusji [National Conference of Scouting Leaders in Łódź. Resolutions, papers, discussions]*, Warsaw 1957.

### Extract from a letter from Aleksander Kamiński to Antoni Wasilewski, graphic artist, columnist:

*The Scouting Movement cannot be a foundation for any one, single political organisation of older youth; quite the opposite – scouting is a universal national movement and it should be positively inclined to the future participation of scouts in a variety of legal organisations – youth, political and ideological – in Poland. The Scouting Movement, like our state, has to recognise the leading role of the Polish United Workers' Party in the country. Its work in the sphere of education should position itself on the Polish road to Socialism with the indispensable aspects of democratisation and national sovereignty.*

Łódź

→ Krzysztof Persak, *Listy Aleksandra Kamińskiego do Antoniego Wasilewskiego z lat 1956–1958 [Letters from Aleksander Kamiński to Antoni Wasilewski, 1956–1958]*, "Więź" Issue no. 8, 1994.



Łódź, Poland,  
8–10 December  
1956. National  
conference of  
the Polish Scout-  
ing Movement.

**Poland.** Demonstrations in Szczecin caused by the intervention of the militia against a drunken man. Demonstrators attack the Civil Militia HQ and also vandalise the USSR Consulate.

**Zygmunt Mycielski:**

*Unrest in Poland is growing. Workers' Councils approve increasingly crazy proposals. As do the students who sympathise with the Hungarians' heroic and tragic resistance. Instances of anarchy multiply all the time. Attacks on the Civil Militia. Ostensibly under the guise of the Peasants' Party, peasants intrude on Party meetings sometimes even wielding axes. Demonstrations have taken place in Szczecin, and windows have even been smashed in the Soviet Consulate. All forms of authority, built on terror, fear, against a background of Soviet bayonets and "security organs", have evaporated. The Militia, the Army, the Party – they have no meaning. Election propaganda takes on a chaotic appearance. "Stalinists" have either taken refuge in mouse holes or they make a lot of noise to divert attention from themselves, or perhaps it is they, themselves, who provoke the incidents [...].*

*The country is dark and dismal, nothing fits, nothing works. Things break down, or are simply unavailable. The trash can of the times, times whose value lies in precision, in brilliance, in speed and in accuracy. Not here, though, not here in our country.*

**Warsaw, 14 December**

→ Zygmunt Mycielski, *Dziennik 1950–1959 [Diary 1950–1959]*, Warsaw 1999.

**11 December**

**Hungary.** Special tribunals are set up; they issue judgements in accordance with the decree concerning states of emergency. During the first weeks following the Soviet invasion, some 200,000 Hungarians escape across the border to Austria or Yugoslavia. A total of some 2,700 Hungarians are killed, as well as some 700 Red Army soldiers. Approximately 22,000 people are sentenced and at least 350 are executed.

**Extract from a Directive on the strength of Act no. 1956/28 in the matter of summary courts:**

*Enemies of the Hungarian People's Republic who are in possession of arms do not shy away even from murder and they intimidate honest people whose peaceful work serves the entire nation. The working peo-*



OŚRODEK KARTA

*ples rightly demand effective directives which will put an end to this intolerable situation. [...]*

*The Praesidial Council of the Hungarian People's Republic introduces a new directive [...] relating to the instigation of court proceedings as a matter of urgency in case of the following offences: murder, pre-meditated murder, arson, theft (looting), deliberate destruction of public buildings or services, or of buildings serving people's livelihood and needs [...], also attempts to carry out such offences, possession of firearms, ammunition or explosives without permits.*

**Budapest, 11 December**

→ *Törvények és rendeletek, 1956 [Acts and Directives, 1956]*, quote from: *Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból, 1956 [From the documents of a certain people's uprising, 1956]*, selection: Tamás G. Korányi, Budapest 1989.

Underground leaflet. Text: "Hungary and Poland".



Warsaw,  
December 1956.  
Women  
queuing.

**Poland.** Throughout the country rehabilitation proceedings continue in relation to victims of political repression – including the case against Kazimierz Moczarski. As a result, he is cleared of all unfounded charges (cooperation with the Germans in action against the Communist resistance movement during the war), for which he had been sentenced to death in 1952.

#### **Jerzy Stempowski in a letter to Jerzy Giedroyc:**

*There [in Warsaw] people are losing their heads. Uncertainty and la grande paura [Italian: great fear] do not allow anyone to concentrate on something which exceeds everyday catastrophes. They can imagine it only too well. I read in "Corriere [della Sera]", that even Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America have been given directives to reassure the people of Eastern Europe, advising patience and avoidance of any major anti-Soviet demonstrations.*

**Bern, 17 December**

→ Jerzy Giedroyc, Jerzy Stempowski, *Listy 1946–1969 [Letters, 1946–1969]*, part 1, Warsaw 1998.

#### **Mieczysław Jastrun:**

*Fear of the people. Such is modern Communism. Communists cannot think in terms other than force. That is what the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is about. [...] There is currently such universal disbelief in development and in the consolidation of the new order in Poland that – despite all hope – I still see myself as a naïve child.*

**Warsaw, 21 December**

→ Mieczysław Jastrun, *Dziennik 1955–1981 [Diary 1955–1981]*, Kraków 2002.

#### **Leszek Dzięgiel:**

*In 1956, we were entering yet another phase of the continuation of the system which was thrust upon us after the war. The new propaganda rhetoric has quickly become fossilised. Different gestures and incantations demonstrating political and ideological correctness. Other forms of protest, allusion and evasive manoeuvres. The leash which had been tugged over the years, slipped out of the hands of those wielding it – but only for a moment. The next minute it was already held firmly, although now the length of the lead had to be much longer than previously.*

**Kraków**

→ Leszek Dzięgiel, *Swoboda na smyczy. Wspomnienia 1946–1956 [Freedom on a leash. Memoirs 1946–1956]*, Kraków 1996.



JAN LENICA / "SWIAT" 1957, ISSUE 18

Sketch entitled  
"Man whose  
thoughts are  
too daring".

Budapest, October  
1956. Statue of  
Stalin demolished  
by insurgents.

