

Warsaw Pact to meet amid food riots, uprisings

by Konstantin George

In early July, a Warsaw Pact summit will be held in Bucharest, Romania. The summit, announced by Soviet TV on June 26, could be the most critical since the “defensive” Pact was formed in 1955 between Moscow and its Eastern European satellites.

June’s events have conspired to heighten Soviet desperation and temptation to military adventure: the outbreak of the most dangerous Hungarian crisis since 1956; the first phase of what may become, by July or August, the biggest social explosion in postwar Poland; and a chain reaction of food riots and national unrest in Soviet Central Asia—unrest that could spread, along with growing famine conditions, to the Ukraine, the Baltic, the Transcaucasus, and Moldavia.

Hungarian breakaway threat

The Hungarian crisis came to a head with the June 23-24 Hungarian Communist Party Central Committee plenum, which effectively fired General Secretary Karoly Grosz, a loyal Moscow stooge. The CC plenum placed Hungary under the rule of a four-man presidium, in reality a triumvirate of “reformist” Politburo members Rezso Nyers, Imre Pozsgay, and Miklos Nemeth, the prime minister, with Grosz on the body as an ornament.

The plenum set Oct. 7 as the date for Hungary’s extraordinary party congress, which, if it goes ahead, will purge the Moscow stalwarts. The new triumvirate is committed to a “multi-party system” and “totally free elections” in 1990, which will definitely end sole rule by the Communist Party, and probably open the way for Hungary to try to leave the Warsaw Pact.

It is only too clear to Moscow that the dynamic in Hungary is fatally parallel to that of 1956, when a “reformist” Communist Party leadership under Imre Nagy came to power

in order to try and placate a popular anti-Russian movement, and ended up being swept by the pro-liberation tidal wave into breaking with Moscow and briefly taking Hungary out of the Warsaw Pact. It all ended in November 1956 when the Red Army conducted a bloodbath in Budapest, crushing the freedom fighters.

The June 13-19 issue of the Soviet weekly *New Times* voiced Moscow’s extreme concern, in directly attributing the Hungarian “counterrevolution” of 1956 to a “multi-party system” that went out of control: “Apparently Imre Nagy and his supporters hoped that by having the Soviet troops out of the country and making concessions to various opposition forces . . . passions could be defused and the situation brought under control.

“However, what with constant reshuffles, the multi-party coalition lost its grip on the country by early November. . . . The government of the Communists proved unable to defend the system, and had lost control of the country.”

Anti-Warsaw Pact rallies

The anti-Russian popular spirit was clearly evident one week before the plenum, at the June 16 Budapest ceremonies of the reburial with full honors for the executed leadership of the 1956 Revolution. Demonstrations broke out in front of the Soviet embassy demanding all Russian troops leave Hungary, and calling for Hungary to leave the Warsaw Pact. Throughout the spring, similar demonstrations had occurred all over Hungary, including several directly outside major Soviet Army bases—all without any police interference.

Before June 16, except for constant polemics by Romania, the Warsaw Pact states had refrained from open attacks on Hungary. Then everything changed. A statement by the East German Politburo, echoed by Czechoslovakia, ex-

pressed “grave concern over developments in Hungary.” Romania escalated its campaign, terming the June 16 Budapest ceremony “fascistic, anti-socialist, anti-Soviet,” and an “anti-Warsaw Treaty Organization manifestation.”

Moscow held its fire until June 23, the day the Hungarian plenum opened, when for the first time since 1956, a Soviet ambassador to Hungary was quoted in the Soviet media denouncing events in that country. Ambassador Boris Stukalin denounced the “anti-Soviet and anti-communist” speeches that had been delivered at the funeral for Imre Nagy and other leaders of the 1956 Revolution. Stukalin added that such speeches are not seen by Moscow as the “official views” of the Hungarian regime, *but* “such occurrences are not conducive to the bilateral relations” between the Soviet Union and Hungary, because “at the event, open attacks on the [Communist] Party” and on the Soviet Union were to be heard.

On June 23, the tone of Soviet radio coverage of the Hungarian CC plenum was no less nasty. Radio Moscow reported, “The Hungarian Party is split. It is split in various currents. . . . One hopes the Party can avoid an open rupture. One hopes the Party can remain united.”

A nervous declaration issued by the Hungarian CC, was read on Hungarian TV and radio, the evening of June 25: The Hungarian CC “condemns anti-Soviet positions, which are a danger to Hungary’s interests, and will turn against all attempts to bring Hungary into conflict with its [Warsaw Pact] neighbors, under the cover of alleged Hungarian national interests,” a clear reference to the U.S.S.R., Romania, and Czechoslovakia. The CC then emphasized that Hungary will not abandon “its obligations to the Warsaw Treaty Organization.” These portions of the declaration were also reported in full by Soviet radio.

But the next part of the Hungarian CC declaration showed how polarized Hungary’s relations have become with nearly all other Warsaw Pact regimes: “The CC of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party does not accept the representations of some foreign political figures and media, who are acting as if the transition [by Hungary, but also implying Poland] to a mixed economic system is a betrayal of socialism, a ‘peaceful counterrevolution.’ The Party clearly distinguishes between protecting socialist values, and sticking to power, by not hesitating to resort to violence.”

George Bush, who has adopted Henry Kissinger’s policy for what Washington fools believe will be the parallel neutralization of Eastern Europe in exchange for the growing neutralization of West Germany, is in for some rude shocks, as he prepares for his July 12-13 trip to Hungary and Poland. A June 26 *Pravda* commentary warned the Bush administration in the bluntest terms that Moscow will never permit a Western-manipulated neutralization of Eastern Europe.

The Soviet party newspaper went on to tell the satellite regimes: “One must not play Poddavki,” a Russian board game where the winner is the first to lose all his pieces on the board, “with the new government” in Washington. *Pravda*

accused the Bush administration of “stubbornly” pursuing a “carrot and stick policy” toward East European countries, “which find themselves in the process of *perestroika* and renewal,” to make them “give up their positions.” *Pravda* reiterated the policy known in the West as the Brezhnev Doctrine since Soviet tanks rolled into Prague in 1968: “Under these conditions,” the “completely independent, sovereign and equal” Warsaw Pact states, “regardless of the new quality of their relations, must undertake joint responsibility for the fate of socialism.” *Pravda* stressed the duties of all Pact members of “internationalism” and “alliance loyalty.”

Poland at the brink

On June 28, the Polish party newspaper, *Trybuna Ludu*, reported what the Poles had known too well for several weeks—that meat had totally disappeared from the shelves of all state shops, making meat ration cards worthless, and that food in general is becoming “ever scarcer.” Meat is only available through private cooperative shops, starting at *six times* the state price per kilogram. Polish Agriculture Minister Olesiak was quoted: “Everyone is afraid that prices will go up, but almost no one is giving thought to the fact that there might not be any food at all.”

Trybuna Ludu revealed heavy drops in agricultural and industrial production during May and June, causing “sinking exports,” and as a consequence “the cancellation of some imports,” including “imports necessary” to maintain production. It also warned that inflation would soon top three digits (the official inflation rate is already at 78%). But with empty state shops, the Polish consumer price index is now based on the prices in the private cooperative shops and the black market, and inflation is already over 100%. The black market rate for the U.S. dollar has gone from 4,000 Polish zloty in January, to over 6,000 zloty by the end of June. The Politburo announcement of June 27, “reassuring” people that there will be no food price hikes until a new government is formed sometime in July, is also a cruel joke. With empty state shops, whatever “price” the state sets for non-existent goods is irrelevant.

The true causality behind the dramatic collapse in food supplies was, of course, not stated by the authorities: The state’s refusal to pay Poland’s private farmers a price coming even close to meeting production costs, coupled with steep price increases in June that have hit the farmers the hardest, has drastically reduced farmers’ sale of cattle and foodstuffs to the state. In April-June, on the average, only one-third as many cattle were sold to the state as during April-June 1988.

Then, in June, the government raised the price of diesel fuel for tractors by 100%, and the price for new tractors and tractor spare parts, by over 90%. That was the last straw for private farmers. By the second half of June, food sales and deliveries to the state had all but stopped, and the shelves in the state stores became emptier with each passing day, reaching the alarm stage by the week of June 26.