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The Third May State Celebrations

About half a million people flocked to Czestochowa for the Church's Millennium celebration, and at least that many gathered in the afternoon of May 3 in the nearby capital of the Silesian mining and industrial basin, Katowice.

Although the town itself has a population of less than 300,000, Communist sources, notably L'Unità of Rome (May 4), claimed that as many as 700,000 people rallied in Katowice's newly built Rondo, a modern replica of London's Picadilly Circus, to listen to speeches and witness the ceremony of laying a cornerstone of a monument dedicated to the memory of Silesian insurgents against the Germans.

L'Unità's estimate sounds rather liberal. Even the Polish radio reporters covering the Katowice event did not go as high -- they played on the safe side referring to "hundreds of thousands." It seems that Reuter's estimate of half a million is closest to the truth, and the figure should not surprise anybody who realizes that Katowice is only a fraction of a huge cluster of towns totalling more than two million out of total of a three and a half million population of the most densely populated (364 per square km) voivodship in Poland. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that the local population is rather well kept under control by strongman Edward Gierek, the voivodship's first Party secretary, and his efficient Party and local government apparatus. (A Western agency reported that the workers and employees of the state-run establishments had simply been ordered to attend the celebration. According to the

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estimates of the local Silesian Party daily, Trybuna Robotnicza, more than half a million people complied.)

Judging by Radio Warsaw reports, the Katowice celebration was close in its pomp and extent to similar events in Moscow or Peking. It was a meeting "unequaled in the history of Katowice," a "meeting of the Millennium." Six thousand singers and trumpeters joined in chorus, and huge portraits, banners, and posters covered the Rondo and adjacent streets. It was a "picture worth the pen of a poet and the brush of a painter," a radio reporter was carried away to say.

The occasion was the laying of the cornerstone of the Silesian Insurgent Monument, a gift to Katowice of the population of Warsaw, and the date coincided with the 45th anniversary of the outbreak of three Silesian uprisings against German domination of the area (1919, 1920, and 1921).

No conciliatory gesture was made vis-à-vis the Germans -- as was the case in Czestochowa on the same evening. Instead, State Council Chairman Edward Ochab stressed in his speech that in "West Germany, again, detachments of the aggressive Bundeswehr keep marching along, while the government of the GFR keeps increasing its pressure to obtain access to nuclear arms." (Needless to say, Ochab did not forget to castigate the US for its "aggression" in Vietnam.)

The speaker also referred to the exchange of letters between Polish and German bishops last year. Silesian insurgents, Ochab said, fought for the "soil of their forefathers, for the soil which neither then was, nor is today, to them or to any Polish patriot, a 'Potsdam territory,' as it has been called on occasion by the authors of the notorious letter of the Polish bishops to the German bishops." It was a bit demagogic on the part of such a high state official to say so, for he must have realized that neither Katowice nor a substantial part of Upper Silesia could have been included into a concept of "Potsdam territories," because the area belonged to Poland before World War II anyway. It was also a bit risky on the part of Politburo member Ochab to invoke the merits of the few individual Communists who participated in the Silesian Uprisings of 1919-1921. For among the crowd listening to the speech there must have been many who remembered that it was the Communist Party of Poland which, on 29 January 1933, on the eve of Hitler's coming to power, issued a resolution condemning the Versailles Treaty and suggesting the return to Germany of Silesia and of the "Danzig Corridor."

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The meeting at Katowice was not the only ^{one,} even in Silesia, devised to compete with the religious ceremonies at Czestochowa. At Chorzow, close to Katowice, a soccer match between Poland and Hungary took place, attracting -- according to Radio Warsaw -- 100,000 fans.

At least two ceremonies took place in Warsaw on May 3. One was the opening of an exhibition devoted to the Third May Constitution of 175 years ago; another was the inauguration of the early May event: the Days of Education, Book, and Press, which this year will last till May 29, longer than the usual two weeks. Both these events were attended by high Party and government officials, including Politburo members Zenon Kliszko and Adam Rapacki.

Cracow State and Church Celebrations

The next confrontation of spiritual and temporal power against the background of the Millennium celebrations took place in Cracow during the weekend of May 7 and 8.

The Church celebrations started in the evening of May 6, when a replica of the miraculous "Black Madonna" of Czestochowa arrived by car in Cracow and was greeted -- despite pouring rain -- by a crowd gathered in the courtyard of the Wawel hill where the ancient cathedral is situated close to the Royal Castle.

Another throng gathered along the expected route of the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, but the local authorities changed the route at the last moment, leaving "disappointed crowds" in heavy rain, Western agencies reported. Twenty-four hours later, Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski asked Catholics to forgive such "childish tricks" by Cracow city authorities. "We must have understanding for these childish tricks and forgiveness," he said, "because we look at these things with the experience of 1,000 years."

Otherwise no clashes between spiritual and temporal elements were reported from Cracow, which may find its explanation in the fact that the State and Church public gatherings were not simultaneous. Even a procession through the city streets was allowed on Sunday, and city authorities helped by blocking all traffic along the route of the procession. Crowds eight-deep lined the streets when the procession emerged from the portals of the Wawel Cathedral, but increased to 20-deep three hours later, when the procession was returning from St. Stanislaw's church one kilometer away. The crowds were "cheering or weeping with emotion, throwing flowers and singing hymns," agencies reported. It was a day of triumph for the Cardinal leading the procession and all the Polish bishops taking part in it, agencies agreed.

There were political undertones in the sermons delivered on the occasion. First of all, May 8 was the day of St. Stanislaw Szczepanowski, a Polish bishop who in the early period of Polish history had a clash with the king, which cost him his life. (Historians will never agree, as they haven't so far, on who was right, the bishop of the king.) Appropriately, the Cardinal said that the Catholic Church had been involved in the fate of Poland for ten centuries and was just as deeply involved today. The "i" was dotted by Archbishop Karol

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Wojtyla in greeting the Cardinal in the Cracow cathedral: "You have received blows to the head and heart. Such blows reach through the past to St. Stanislaw himself."

However, none of the Church dignitaries referred to the recent quarrel over the exchange of letters between the Polish and German bishops. Rather mild references were made to this issue by representatives of the regime celebrating the 21st anniversary of Victory Day.

A crowd estimated by Radio Warsaw at 100,000 people gathered at the Cracow market place in the early afternoon of Saturday, May 7, to listen to speeches and view the decorations. Huge portraits of three Polish kings, Mieszko I, Boleslaw the Brave, and Wladyslaw Jagiello were displayed opposite those of three present rulers of the country, Wladyslaw Gomulka, Edward Ochab and Jozef Cyrankiewicz.

Cyrankiewicz delivered the main speech, in which he appealed for national unity without any "division into believers and non-believers." On foreign policy there were the usual strong words for West Germany and the USA. Cyrankiewicz attacked the GFR for its recent "pathetic peace notes," which -- he claimed -- were received with "skepticism and distrust." The USA was criticized for its "dirty war" in Vietnam.

The Chairman of the Cracow Voivodship People's Council, Jozef Nagorzanski, also did not spare either West Germany or the USA. He clearly referred to the Polish bishops' letter to the German bishops when he vowed:

"We shall never forget the Hitlerite crime of genocide! We shall never forgive those guilty of such crimes!"

Rapacki Attacks the Bishops' Letter

In another Victory Day celebration, this time in Wroclaw on May 8, Foreign Minister and Politburo member Adam Rapacki devoted nearly all of his speech to the exchange of letters between the Polish and German bishops and to Polish foreign policy vis-a-vis West Germany.

The "meaning of the message of the Polish Episcopate to the German bishops can be reduced to the concept" of Poland as the bulwark of Christianity, i.e. hostile toward the Soviet Union, the Foreign Minister stated. He also stated quite bluntly that the Polish bishops must be told that "for years West German governmental circles have been calling for a dialogue with the Poles which will by-pass the Polish government." These West German circles, Rapacki claimed, see "no hope of coming to an understanding with the Polish Communist government." In this respect, "they are right." For, Rapacki warned, "the Polish government does not intend to discuss such questions as Poland's frontiers and the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic with anybody."

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Kliszko to See De Gaulle

The deputy speaker of the Polish Sejm, Zenon Kliszko, arrives in Paris today with a Polish parliamentary delegation at the invitation of Jacques Chaban Delmas, Chairman of the French National Assembly.

While in Paris, Kliszko, who is also a secretary of the PZPR Central Committee and member of the Politburo, will be received by General De Gaulle according to a communiqué of the French National Assembly. The communiqué also announced that the delegation will be received by Premier Georges Pompidou and Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville. An RFE Special recalls that Warsaw had last year proposed Kliszko as an envoy to renew Polish-French friendship, but that his candidacy was turned down by Paris for protocol reasons, and the problem was finally solved by the visit to Paris last September of Premier Jozef Cyrankiewicz (cf. SR of 4 March and 26 July 1965).

It is interesting to recall what the French paper L'Express wrote at that time. According to L'Express, when confronted with the Polish desire to send Kliszko to Paris De Gaulle apparently snorted: "Kliszko? Connais pas" and added that if Kliszko came to Paris it would be Waldeck Rochet who would receive him.

Polish-French Cultural Agreement Prepared for Signature

The head of the French Foreign Ministry's Cultural Section, Jean Basdevant, arrived in Warsaw on April 25 to prepare a new Franco-Polish cultural agreement for signature by Foreign Minister Couve de Murville, who will visit Poland in May, an RFE Special from Paris reported on April 26. The new agreement according to another RFE Special (April 29), is valid until the end of 1970. Until now, Franco-Polish cultural exchanges have been concluded on a two-year basis.