

Ho hum! Why it's only Georgymania

President Bush's advisers are fed up watching Gorbymania sweep western Europe. So next week, Bush will forgo fishing in Maine, put on a suit, and fly off to visit Poland and Hungary. Will Budapest and Warsaw erupt in Georgymania? Anything is possible with the hot-blooded Hungarians and Poles.

More likely, Bush will get a warm, even enthusiastic welcome but nothing like the smarmy Gorbby-orgy put on by the Germans last month.

Still, Bush will arrive in East Europe right in the middle of its most dramatic and turbulent days since World War II.

Hungary and Poland are both decommunizing rapidly. On Wednesday, Gorbachev said in Paris that East Europe could chose its own system. The Red Army's tanks would not roll if non-communists came to power. Solidarity, Poland's now legal opposition, entered Parliament last week. In Hungary, it seems only a matter of time before a non-communist opposition is legalized. Neither nation, however, has yet allowed that other hallmark of democracy, a free press. No communist party has ever voluntarily given up political power.

Why should Hungarian and Polish communists change this pattern? Particularly now that a free vote in Poland proved a humiliating disaster for the communist party. If they do, it will probably be because of what I call 'Latino junta syndrome' (LJS).

In the past, Latin American armies always thirsted for political power. The generals wouldn't miss a chance to stage a coup and form a military junta to rule the nation. For a time, almost every Latin American nation was ruled by tubby, bemedaled generals. But these Latino generals, one excepted, proved inept in both war and peace.

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Worse, they knew nothing of economics. The result was financial and economic ruin — just, in fact, like present-day Poland. Chile was the only exception. There, General Pinochet proved an even better economist than soldier. He knocked heads until he got the debt, inflation, wages and government spending under control. Chile was saved from collapse by wise economic dictatorship. Everywhere else, it had failed.

The Latin generals finally decided that they didn't want power anymore. There were too many unsolvable economic headaches and the public was getting furious at the army. Better to bow out and let civilians — or almost anybody else — wrestle with the hopeless economic mess. This is LJS and I suspect it holds true, as well, for Poland and Hungary. Their communist parties do not want to permanently give up power or become extinct.

The Polish economy is on the verge of collapse: everything is in short supply; the foreign debt is close to \$55 billion. Hungary is in much better shape but hard times are on the way. Both nations are drowning in debt and must now figure out how to start paying them off. Enter George Bush, smiling. He, Poles and Magyars hope, will pay their bills. But they will be disappointed. Uncle Sam is up to his top hat in debts and can't afford

to put the lovable, but broke Poles and Hungarians on weekly allowance.

He will dole out a few quarters and pats on the back. That's all. There will be no Marshall Plan for East Europe — at least not from the U.S. So the Polish and Hungarian communists, now totally discredited in the public view, may wish, like the Latin juntas, to get off the bridge before the ship hits the iceberg which all can see lies dead ahead.

Let the opposition do all the unpopular things like firing workers, lowering wages and raising taxes. Then, when everybody is furious at the non-communist government, and has forgotten what went before, the communists will return from exile and regain power with promises of a salami on every plate and freebies for all in a 'caring, humane, socialist family.'

Look, for example, at Poland. Both the communists and Solidarity are playing an Alphonse-Gaston routine, saying 'please, after you.' Neither wants to run Poland right now. Even in Moscow, there is talk that the Soviet communist party may follow a similar strategy if the economy keeps deteriorating. In fact, this may be Mikhail Gorbachev's grand strategy: elevate the communist party to a powerful advisory body, or a sort of House of Lords with teeth, while leaving the daily dirty work to elected political parties.

Then there is Romania, once a U.S. favorite but now shunned by all. Romania has just managed to pay off all of its once huge foreign debt. To do this, Romanians had to eat grass and shiver in the dark.

The communist parties of Poland, Hungary and the USSR do not want to follow Romania's scary solution. Better stick the capitalist hyenas with the job, go take a rest and catch up on Marxist reading.