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THE POLISH CRISIS OF 1980 AND THE POLITICS OF SURVIVAL (U)

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Jane Leftwich Curry

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THE POLISH CRISIS OF 1980 AND THE POLITICS OF SURVIVAL

Jane Leftwich Curry

The Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California

The collapse of the Gierek leadership in Poland followed a two-month siege of workers' strikes ostensibly triggered by selective meat price increases. In fact, however, the collapse more accurately reflected the degree of political and social bankruptcy of the Party and state in Poland. The repercussions of the strikes have been devastating for the Party and its old leadership. Yet, in spite of the turmoil within the Party and its old leadership, as well as the search for alternatives which is now going on, Poland is still at a stage where "radical change in the political system is seen by the population as both absolutely necessary and completely impossible." [1] The problems and paralysis in Poland are far more acute than elsewhere in the Soviet bloc, but all these countries have similar problems. None of the bloc

[1] Doswiadczenie i Przyszlosc Polski (Experience and the Future of Poland), "[Report on the State of the Nation and the Possibilities for Improvement]," Warsaw, May 19, 1979. This report was based on a private survey of 50 prominent Polish intellectuals and had been privately circulated to selected Party leaders, Cardinal Wyszynski, and trusted members of the intellectual community before the dissident press started circulating it within Poland and abroad. Every attempt was made by the authors to avoid this. The prescriptive conclusions of this report have since been supplemented by a second survey and report on "What Is There To Do?" circulated in the late spring of 1980.

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nations has entered the 1980s free from the specter of real economic crisis. Poland's is the first and most severe case but will certainly not be the last. The population of the eighties in Poland and elsewhere in the Soviet bloc is cut from a different bolt of cloth than any of its predecessors. They remember few of the sacrifices of World War II or hardships of the postwar reconstruction. Terror has not been as real an element in their lives as it was for previous generations. What they want to know is what the system will do for them, not what they can or must do for the system. The very institutions and ties of the society have changed. The Communist Party has essentially become a stable but bankrupt bureaucracy. There is a dissident movement in Poland that is far more open and active than its counterparts elsewhere in the Soviet bloc. The Catholic Church is stronger and more politicized. And, whether or not some degree of detente between the Soviet Union and the United States continues, Poland has moved more fully into the European community. These changes in the society, the Party, and the international climate leave few options for real change and for the resolution of the problems endemic to the society.

The strikes themselves are dramatically different from the strikes and unrest that have rocked Poland three times since 1956. They were started, organized and led by workers who had been involved in earlier strikes and the repression that followed. The recent strikes were in a very real way "worker-controlled." In times past, workers have risen up when the top leadership was visibly divided and the intellectuals were in revolt. This time the riots occurred at a time when Gierek had the most united leadership ever in postwar Poland. Intellectuals within and

outside the Party warned of collapse but had no ready solutions, nor did they have openings in the mass media to communicate their concerns. Even the dissident groups that formed after the 1976 price riots "to protect the workers," felt, before the strikes, that they had no real links to the working class and were becoming more and more isolated. Their early link, the Catholic Church, had, since Pope Paul's visit, been willing to take fewer risks to champion their concerns.

This time the workers have "ruled" in a void since the unrest began in July. The dissidents and their intellectual colleagues in the establishment have rushed to catch up to the workers. The leadership has no other choice but to concede to workers' demands. For the first time there are no alternatives. The workers are too strong to be easily put down by force even if the Polish army and police could be counted on to fire on demonstrators. Poland's existing debt to the West and to the Soviet Union makes it impossible to find quick palliatives and bring economic relief. The ultimate solution can only come from painful economic reforms requiring sacrifices the workers have so far rejected making. The Communist Party itself is so weak that it can neither lead battles nor make any promises. It can only turn on itself and seek scapegoats as it is now doing.

Finally, detente and Gierek's own policies have so internationalized the situation that as the price increases were triggered in part to prove to Western bankers that Poland was acting to resolve its problems, the ultimate outcome for the Polish problem depends on the support and tolerance of the West and the Soviet Union. As a result, domestic Soviet and Western politics are critical to the future of Poland.

II

The final trigger for the upheavals in Poland was the announcement that the government was once again going to begin to move to end the costly subsidies of food. The government clearly hoped that by announcing increases in the cost of only a few cuts of meat, which had long since disappeared from the marketplace anyway, popular reaction would be diminished. And, the leadership thought that by gradually implementing the increases throughout Poland, the reaction that had forced the recall of increases in 1970 and 1976 would be avoided. They were wrong.

The announcement of the increases had far broader implications for the workers. It meant that the government was no longer afraid to use prices to reduce consumer demand. Since 1976, the workers had tolerated the government's "shell game" of buying off localized disaffection with special food shipments and factory meat stores; repackaging, renaming, and repricing goods to camouflage price increases and declining quality; and opening "commercial stores" with meat, shoes, and special groceries, unavailable in normal stores, at far more than their normal price. The government had even coopted the black market to obtain Western currency. All of this left the workers strapped for money and time.

These increases signaled the beginning of the end. As they were carried out in cities throughout Poland, workers in individual factories and transportation centers reacted by sitting in and demanding wage increases. Rather than start nationwide unrest or risk testing the loyalty of the rank and file army and police, the leaders elected to leave it to individual managers to meet with workers and grant them the necessary

concessions. As word spread that concessions were being granted, the work stoppages and the demands increased. The leadership consoled itself with the notion that it had not had to retreat on the principle of ending food subsidies. Such a "victory," though, was an illusory one since the cost of the workers' demands far out-distanced any gains in principle.

Ultimately, however, the economic crisis brought out the political and social bankruptcy of the state and Party. When the price increases went into effect in Gdansk and the shipyard workers struck, government and management concessions were not enough. These older, established workers remembered their strikes in 1970 and 1971 and how ephemeral their gains had been. When they had struck in 1971, they had held the shipyard for three days and forced Gierek himself to come and respond to their demands. None of his concessions on ending price increases, free trade unions, recognition of police violence, and honest information in the mass media had held. So this time, the workers were not willing to settle for concessions on their economic demands. They demanded a guarantee of the right to strike; the right to form independent trade unions; an end to censorship over information and religious broadcasts; wage increases to compensate for the declared and hidden inflation of prices; improved social welfare benefits; and better working conditions. Economic reform or changes in Poland's foreign policy did not figure into the demands. The Party or Party institutions did not have enough importance to be mentioned in the demands. Furthermore, there was no new Party leader or local Party official with enough credibility to offer meaningful promises or to convince the workers to end their strike.

Gierek had only two choices: to wait the strikes out until the workers tired and gave up, or to settle. While both of these options must have been unsettling to the men in the Politburo, they realized that force was not a viable option. First of all, they were faced with workers garrisoned in shipyards organizing themselves for a long seige and not a mob on the street. Secondly, information on the strikes was being disseminated rapidly through the intellectual dissident groups to all of Poland's creditor nations in the West. If this was not enough, Stanislaw Kania and various military officials had made it very clear from late July in local Party meetings, and certainly to the national leadership as well, that the army could not be relied upon to fire on the workers. The only serious threat of force the Polish leadership could muster was the threat of a Soviet invasion, a tactic that was contrary to Soviet interests during the critical West German election campaign. It is also widely surmised that the Soviet leadership made it plain to Gierek before he returned to Poland from his Black Sea vacation that he had to find a political solution.

Settling the strikes by giving in to the workers' demands was not a palatable solution for Gierek, the leader who had told workers repeatedly that he was a worker and understood their problems. Neither was the mounting attention being given the Polish situation in the West acceptable. So the leadership sent Interpress, the Polish press agency for foreign audiences, to the shipyards to organize press centers for foreign journalists in the hope that the strikes would appear to the outside world as though they were normal events. This also served to

make the dissidents irrelevant couriers. But it did not satisfy the strikers' desires for publicity in the national and local press.

The continued vociferousness of the strikes enlivened the dormant opposition within the Party. When Gierek called a Central Committee meeting to demonstrate that the Party stood firm and that concessions would be hard won, a floodgate of criticism was opened. Old Party liberals and representatives of the military and the police formed an awkward coalition of convenience to attack the policy excesses that brought Poland to this stalemate. The outcome of the meeting was a minipurge of men closely associated with Gierek and the return of men like Stefan Olszowski who had long made clear their opposition to Gierek and his policies of economic drift and bureaucratic expansion. For some of the Party leaders, this must have seemed like a dramatic sign to the workers that the Party had begun to react to their demands. But, since Gierek had systematically removed everyone with a popular following from high Party positions, the only men who could replace the victims of the purge of convenience were an unknown group of "grey men" from the Party bureaucracy. There was no alternate leader with popular support to put in Gierek's place. Furthermore, the striking workers were seasoned veterans. They remembered that new names did not bring new policies. So, the strikes continued. At this point, there was no choice for the leadership but to negotiate with the strikers. Party and state authorities seemed powerless. The costs of the spreading strikes, by now estimated at over a million dollars a day, were mounting and further threatening Poland's credibility. Government teams were formed to negotiate with the workers in Gdansk and Szczecin. Ten days of off and on

negotiations began in the crowded meeting rooms of the shipyards.

Strikes sprung up elsewhere and more teams of negotiators were formed while leading negotiators shuttled back and forth.

III

The start of the negotiations and the minipurge had had a liberating effect on the mass media and the intelligentsia. Meetings sprang up all over Warsaw. Information was suddenly published on the extent of Poland's debt and about discussions that had been held within the Central Committee. The strikes themselves began to be a media event, albeit an undeclared one. At the same time, the government took its first concerted action against the dissident intellectuals. Sweeping arrests were made of all of the members of the Committee to Protect the Workers who had been acting as informants on the strikes. In this move, the leaders' gamble worked as there was no reaction from the workers. Class divisions continued to hold.

In their final negotiations with the government, the strike leaders invited lawyers, journalists, and sociologists to come from Warsaw. Most were tied to the Catholic Intellectual Clubs which had long been established critics of Poland's politics. Ironically, the willingness of these intellectuals and the Catholic hierarchy to counsel moderation made it possible for a settlement to be reached. Both groups warned workers in public and in private that total victory would at best be pyrrhic.

The Church pressed to have religious issues left out of the agreements. Its overall role in the strikes and settlements continued the pattern established after the Pope's visit. Relations with the declared dissident groups were cool. The strikers were supported in an ad hoc fashion by local priests and individual members of the Catholic intelligentsia. But though the symbols of Catholicism were prominently

displayed by the striking workers, the Church hierarchy itself made clear the need for order and compromise on both sides. Its official recognition of Walesa and the other strike leaders came when Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, the head of Poland's Catholic Church, held a private audience with them. That, however, was only after the signing of the pact between the strike leaders and the government's representatives had given them de facto government recognition. In the end, the Church strengthened its position with the political establishment. The agreement on the workers' demand that masses should be publicly broadcast had been a major issue of the Church for years. On the other hand, the Church hierarchy's refusal to advocate complete concessions to the workers' demands cannot help but weaken the Church's traditional image as the haven for opposition to the communist system. It also marks a return to the old split between the Church hierarchy, concerned with getting concessions by playing the game, and the Catholic intelligentsia, concerned with challenging the system.

The intelligentsia had little real contact with the striking workers themselves, nor did most openly support the strikes until the settlement had been reached. The only intellectuals who were directly involved with the strikers were the specialists they invited as advisors and the managers with whom they originally negotiated. The advisors supported the workers' right to strike but worked to modify their demands and insert provisions with far broader implications.

The workers' demands were quite different from the critiques voiced by some of the same intellectuals who came to serve as their advisors. Liberal intellectuals in the Party have made it clear that the economic

complaints of the workers were far from illegitimate "consumerism." [2] Their proposed solutions, however, have involved the very economic "belt-tightening" that the workers revolted against. They have also involved major structural decentralization and changes in institutions for economic and political management that would delegate both authority and responsibility to the parliament and representative local authorities. Such decentralization would, ultimately, require a rationalization of expenditures and an increase in worker productivity, changes which the economic concessions demanded by the workers make virtually impossible. Finally, the economic demands of the striking workers did not involve comparable gains by white collar workers. This means that the gap between white-collar workers and the working class could be narrowed if not abolished.

While their colleagues around the country slowly began to test the effect of the changes brought about by the workers' successes, the specialist advisors worked almost as liaisons between the strike leaders and the government negotiators. The accords that were finally signed on national television on August 31, 1980, are not the same as the demands originally formulated by the workers. Whether as a result of the new information on Poland's economic crisis presented the strike leaders or the influence of the outside advisors, new provisions were added and key worker demands modified. The workers' economic demands were not all granted and many that were, were modified. Demands for economic reform and public discussion of the problems and alternatives were inserted.

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[2] Mieczyslaw F. Rakowski, "Ludzie i gospodarka," Polityka, July 9, 1980, p. 1.

The basic political demands of the workers for free trade unions, an end to censorship, and acknowledgment of the right to strike were granted in principle. In fact, the accords legitimize existing state structures. As a matter of political necessity, workers gave verbal legitimacy to the supremacy of the Communist Party. They made no demands for changes in any economic or political institution or process other than adding free trade unions and legally regulating censorship. On the question of censorship, a mere weakening of the overwhelming controls of the past six years could not help but lead to a dramatic change.

Journalists' reaction to the sudden relaxation of controls has thus far been more circumscribed than it was in 1956 in Poland or during the Czechoslovak Prague Spring of 1968. They have used the freedom to discuss issues in the media that deal with economic problems and to report news of the strikes. But, they have not yet attacked the question of press freedom itself. In part, this is because the censorship office continues to function. In part, too, it may be that journalists feel if the society goes as far as the Czechs did in 1968, the Soviets' hand will be forced and any existing gains will be lost in an invasion.

Potentially even more significant than any of these concessions is the authority the whole experience of the strikes has given to Polish parliamentary institutions. Every major institutional, social, or political demand accepted by the negotiators was left as a simple statement of intent to be discussed and enacted, not by worker-government or worker-Party negotiations, but by the parliament. The sense of legitimacy and power this has given to the parliament is already clear. The question that remains is whether the parliament will be able to deliver

acceptable laws quickly enough to satisfy the workers.

In the end, however, the intellectuals were only able to effect the paper agreements. How the agreements will be actualized remains an open question. It depends in large part on whether the workers are willing to play their trump card and strike again. So far, they have defied the government and held a one hour strike to demand quick resolution of their wage demands. Their commitment to free trade unions has not been challenged as the courts have simply registered every new union.

Yet the much-discussed trade union agreement is highly problematic. No provision has been made for funding or for union representation on any policy-making body. Nor has the necessity of membership in the Central Trade Unions been eliminated. These unions still control pensions, day-care, health facilities, vacation facilities, and apartment space. How the free trade unions will survive, when they can provide no real benefits to members and must, if they are drawn into policy decisions, advocate some difficult belt-tightening, remains an open question. It is this issue which apparently determines the workers' leaders' action and new demands.

The irony in the strike settlements and their aftermath is that the granting of free trade unions, the right to strike, and a limitation on censorship were the least expensive and easiest of the concessions for the government to grant. Even if the "free trade unions" survive and do not turn into Hungarian or Yugoslav-style workers' councils which recognize that economic gains can come only with gains in productivity, their formation was an easy concession. Ultimately, the most difficult demands to fulfill are the economic demands. Yet for these, there simply

are no resources left. Emergency loans and aid came during the strikes from West and East. Such aid is a luxury Poland can hardly expect to receive, much less afford, again. What outsiders now believe should happen is not the placating of workers' demands but their reduction. Yet, for the workers, all of their political demands were merely ways to protect their economic interests and gains.

IV

The denouement of the settlements came with Gierek's convenient heart attack. This time, the shift in leadership did not bring the breath of hope that Gomulka and Gierek's takeovers had brought. Instead, it was an expected maneuver. Only the replacement, Stanislaw Kania, was unexpected. Not only was he an unknown figure but he was hardly the man to inspire confidence that the concessions would be a start to broader social reform. Stanislaw Kania, like the other "grey men" of the Gierek leadership, is an inveterate organization man. Since joining the Party in 1945 his only work has been in Party organizations: first as an executive in the Party youth organizations and then as an official in the Party bureaucracy. In these positions, he has stayed out of the public eye. His public reputation has been built since he was promoted by Gierek to a position as one of the top officials in the Party bureaucracy in 1975. But his assignment--to supervise the military, Interior Ministry, and the Church--was the one that gave him the least public exposure of any of the top Party leaders.

Like other Polish leaders, his views are complex. On the one hand, he made it clear to the Gdansk Party leadership in mid-July that

things are going on today that go beyond the permissible limits. On the other hand, it would be bad to say that it was counter-revolution. We must respond by talking to the strikers. Only this way can we isolate the strikes.[3]

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[3] Speech of Stanislaw Kania to the Regional Committee of the Gdansk PUWP organization on August 18, 1980, issued by the Information Center for Polish Affairs, London .

It is rumored that he sided with those who pressed for economic reform. Yet six months later, he led the committee responsible for drawing up the platform for the Party Congress--a platform notable only for its lack of criticism and alternative proposals. On the other hand, he has long been known as one of the advocates of ending the toleration of the dissident movements which have sprung up in Poland since 1976. He is also rumored to have originally opposed allowing Pope John Paul II to return to his homeland; but, once the decision was made, he saw to it that the visit went off with unexpected precision.

Kania's position alone makes it likely that he has close contacts in the Soviet Union. Certainly the appointment of a man whose public reputation ties him to the secret police must be a reassuring sign that the Polish leadership will make every effort to keep control and not to encourage the population to escalate its demands. In addition, if rumors can be believed, his appointment and the demotion of Gierek's closest colleagues came immediately after sharp Soviet media attacks on the Polish situation and secret meetings between Polish and Soviet leaders. Although we will probably never know what actually transpired in the closed Politburo session of September 6th, questions still remain. Can Kania lead? What does his election signal?

Kania is, in almost every way, a product of the Gierek era. He rose from an obscure Party bureaucrat to ever higher positions in the Party following Gierek's takeover. His opportunity to become first secretary came as a result of the void which Gierek's restructuring of the Party created. The relative insignificance of his ties with the most distrusted agencies in Poland (the secret police, the military and

the Party bureaucracy) reflects not a new tolerance of these groups but the isolation and popular irrelevance of the leadership. His victory over Stefan Olszowski, who was brought back from ambassadorial exile in East Germany to placate Party liberals, is a reflection of the overwhelming strength of the Party bureaucrats. For them, the selection of Olszowski would have been a threat to their position and power, since he is identified with professionals and Party intellectuals who oppose the usurpation of power by the bureaucracy.

Kania's victory did not mark a real struggle for power and positions. There were no popular options left in the Party leadership by the end of the February Party Congress. There, Gierek had taken advantage of the dissent which was expressed by regional representatives about the state of the country to remove the last of the remaining Party personalities from the sixties. The men who survived were not men who had links with Party members, much less with the population at large. These survivors were skilled at bureaucratic infighting, not in "working the crowds" or in fighting out ideological and policy disputes by getting support from outside the Party leadership.

Nor had Gierek let any regional Party leaders develop who might compete with his power and authority. The regional Party organizations traditionally linked Party leaders to Party members and provided a training ground for Party politicians. It was on this basis that Gierek himself rose to power. In the seventies, Gierek weakened the regional units by subdividing them into tiny subregions. Local leaders, even in the most prestigious areas, were relegated to the position of delegates from the center. Decisionmaking and public contacts were increasingly

delegated to the "visiting firemen" from the Central Committee bureaucracy. Thus the leadership changes in Poland and the election of Kania and Josef Pinowski as Prime Minister were in themselves another victory for the Party bureaucracy. This, in spite of the fact that the control of Central Committee bureaucrats is a major source of irritation within the Party and the society at large.

In a letter to Gierek, Edward Ochab, the First Secretary of the Party before Gomulka's takeover, and twelve other former high officials of the Party summarized the broader public views of the Party bureaucracy as

an impediment that is steering the Party onto a path that runs contrary to its democratic and social nature. This machine does not encourage an idealistic approach but rather encourages insincerity and torpor.[4]

Furthermore, this is the group which is blamed for blocking Party leaders and policymakers from getting all of the information that they need to make their decisions. They have accumulated so much power that they began in the late seventies to give their "bosses," Central Committee members, orders. They are regularly accused of using their power and prerogatives to better their own situation at whatever the costs.

Ironically, Kania's initial posture as First Secretary seems to indicate that he both recognizes and accepts the fact that the dominance of bureaucrats like himself has isolated the Party leadership from the population, and that the Party now has neither a popular base nor any

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[4] Letter of Edward Ochab et al, translated in Peter Raina, Political Opposition in Poland, 1954-1977, London, Poets and Painters Press, 1978.

real credibility. The legacy of the seventies, then, is that the Party leadership is tolerated by the population simply because it is meaningless. So far, Kania has not tried to "turn the Party around" and activate its links with the population. Instead, he has made it clear that as a leader he will stay in the background and "guide." He has also avoided becoming a public figure who seeks public support. For now, remaining a "grey man" is a convenient ploy. The Party has no resources with which to garner support. Nor is it in a position to raise the hopes of the population for real gains. So Kania shuns the public exposure which he has avoided for his entire career. And, more importantly, he has had to make no promises and has not had to enter into any kind of dialogue with the workers.

So far, the Party leadership has avoided the touchy questions of new policy and reform. It has reacted to the dissatisfaction of Party members that has tumbled forth since the strikes and political concessions began by looking for individual scapegoats. In heated sessions of the Central Committee, individuals who have become rich men as Party bureaucrats and leaders have fought for their political (and economic) lives. Some have lost to the leaders' desire to quell disaffection by isolating a few of the most flagrantly corrupt high officials or by blaming those who have set themselves apart by creating their own strong bureaucratic fiefdoms. But, given the special privileges which Party bureaucrats have managed to accrue to themselves and the workers' demand that "the privileges of the police, security service and Party apparatus be abolished,"[5] the number of public accusations has been remarkably

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[5] Point 12, Protocol of Agreement of the Government Committee with the Inter-factory Strike Committee, Gdansk Shipyard, August 31, 1980.

small. So far, this ploy has only heightened public disgust with the Party and subjected individual Party members in many places to scorn. To go much further, though, would implicate even the highest level officials of the Gierek era. It would also give final testimony to the correctness of public perceptions that the Party is essentially an organ of corruption. This could only destroy any hope of the Party ever being taken seriously as a force for national policy.

V

What next? What are the other options open to the Kania leadership? Do these strikes and concessions, if they are carried out fully, portend a real shift in Polish politics? Or does the legacy of the seventies still cast a shadow over the potential for the eighties?

These questions cannot yet be answered. Even if there are no further spontaneous eruptions in Poland, the leadership and the system itself face some severe tests in the next months. First, the government must deliver by the end of the year on the economic gains that it promised the workers in their settlements. The Polish parliament must prepare, discuss, and pass the legal provisions for the control of censorship, the establishment of unions, and the right to strike before January or the accords will be violated. Secondly, the Party leadership must set its own house in order enough to organize the promised special Party Congress early in 1981. Already there are signs that this will be an unruly and contentious gathering with delegates who have been elected by ad hoc Party meetings since the strike settlements.

Success in all of these areas is still no guarantee of an end to the "Polish crisis." The twenty billion dollar debt which Poland has accumulated since 1971 darkens every prospect for short term gains. The majority of Poland's debt is owed to the banks and governments in Western Europe most committed to detente--West Germany, France, Austria and Sweden. These, though, are states which are experiencing a period of recession and rapidly increasing energy costs. As a result, not only may the saleability of Polish products in their markets be reduced, but their willingness to reschedule the several billions Poland owes them in

the near future may be more limited. If Western European nations, along with the United States, unite to bail Poland out so that it can survive and fulfill its commitments to the workers, there is no guarantee that the Soviet Union and the other East European states will be able to tolerate the possible contagion of Polish workers' successes. Poland has been allowed to be a renegade bloc state in the past because the Party in Poland never lost its ultimate control and concessions made were not so suddenly relevant to bloc populations elsewhere. That may not necessarily be true today. The Party leadership must work hard to find options to shore up its control.

The significance of Polish workers' demands and the gains which they have made could become all too relevant to the workers of the Soviet Union, East Germany and, to a lesser degree, the other states in Eastern Europe. Minor attempts have already been made to establish free trade unions in the Soviet Union--attempts which were met with rapid and brutal repression. Unlike the Polish worker rioting in 1970 over price increases, the Soviet worker entered the 1970s with raised expectations based on his gains in the late sixties and promises that these gains would continue. Now he, like his Polish counterpart, has faced disappointment and faces a new decade when it is likely to be difficult for him to even maintain his current rate of progress.[6] Already East Germany and the Soviet Union have embarked on a propaganda blitz to make it

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[6] M. Elizabeth Denton, "Soviet Consumer Policy: Trends and Prospects," in Soviet Economy in a Time of Change, Vol. I, Joint Economic Committee, October 10, 1979, p. 760. For a complete discussion of Soviet economic difficulties, see the recent article by Seweryn Bialer, "The Politics of Stringency in the USSR," Problems of Communism, May-June, 1980.

clear that the Polish solutions are not appropriate to their situations or are being funded from the outside. They have attempted to cut out any contact between their populations and the events in Poland.

If it seems clear that the demands of the Polish workers are going to be imitated by their own workers, and that the Polish Party cannot get control, the Soviets and their closest allies may be forced to intervene. In this event, however, the West may be an effective counterweight in the Soviet decision to use military might. Although no one expects the West to take any action to protect the Poles from Soviet force, an invasion of Poland would have dire economic consequences for the Soviet Union. Not only would intervention be protracted and costly (requiring the Soviet Union to be directly involved militarily outside its borders at the same time in Poland and Afghanistan), but it would also most certainly provoke the kind of sanctions from Western Europe which the United States sought after the invasion of Afghanistan. In addition, this would probably mean an end to any Western aid and loan concessions to Poland and to Poland's ability to produce. As a result, the Soviets would have to assume the burden of the Polish debt in order to assure some economic credibility to other bloc nations. This in itself would be a real strain for the Soviet economy which has already had to use its hard currency resources to bail Poland out before. After the strikes, before the Soviets granted Poland a 680 million dollar loan of hard currency and special trade advantages, they pressed the Polish leadership to get what they could from the West first. While it would seem that to a large extent Poland is unable to control its own ultimate destiny, the Polish leadership and the population must seek some solu-

tions to their economic dilemmas. These solutions must be tailored not only to a reversal of the economic legacy of the seventies, but also to the transformation which occurred during that decade in Polish society.

VI

The message which brought Gierek to power and gave him instant popularity was that Poland could quickly become prosperous and industrialized by importing technology and providing real incentives for workers to work. All of the groups within the Party at the time realized that drastic economic changes had to be made to quell the pervasive current of unrest and strengthen Poland's international economic position. To date, there is no popular base for repudiating the policies of industrialization, opening up to the West, or trying to increase prosperity.

What groups within and outside the Party object to is the poor planning which went into the initial programs. Gierek's planners did not take into account the possibility of an economic recession in the West which would make Poland's new products unmarketable and imports expensive. Nor, apparently, did they do market research to see what they could best produce and sell. Instead of capitalizing on Poland's supply of cheap labor, Poland invested in areas where its production would have to compete with Western European and Japanese products. This Poland has largely been unable to do.

The plans also did not take into account the possibility of decreases in Soviet exports and increases in the ruble costs for its energy resources. This has forced Poland to cut back substantially on its energy consumption. In turn, it has forced it to concentrate its efforts on generating hard currency for debt repayment, technology purchases, and the increased costs of energy resources needed to fuel new and old industry rather than on providing for domestic needs. Yet, as its economic picture has grown worse, Poland has had to go to the Soviet

Union for emergency loans, and, in exchange, it has had to ship much needed food and consumer goods to Soviet markets to make up for the United States boycott and the strains of the Olympics. Finally, the economic and political system never lost its director's mentality and administrative character. Economic affairs ministries invested in whole new factories without considering whether dependable and usable quantities of raw materials were available, what the costs of training workers and managers would be, how the products would be finished and shipped, or where the markets were. Nor did the planners consider what items were really essential for the nation when they bought licenses for larger cars and color television sets at a time when they could not provide sufficient public or mass housing.

For all of its fallacies, the original plan worked in the short term.[7] But, by 1976, the leadership and the population started to realize that the last half of the seventies would be far less upbeat. Then, when Poland owed about six billion dollars, the Polish leaders tried half-heartedly to begin domestic cutbacks by raising food prices--a move which was roundly rejected by the population. But no attempt was made for any real economic reform or rethinking of Poland's growing dependence on the Western economies. Instead, in the next five years,

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[7] At the end of 1975, the gross national product had increased by 59 percent over 1970 with the rate of industrial production going up 44.3 percent. Aided by a continuing freeze on food prices from January 1971 until the end of 1974, real wages in 1975 went up 40.9 percent over 1970 for an average annual growth rate of 8 percent, a major change from the average of 1.9 percent during the whole previous decade. The industrial boom provided new jobs, brought higher income and created the foundations for an emerging feeling of material security among the population. Quoted from Jan de Weydenthal, The Communists in Poland, Stanford, California, Hoover Institution Press, 1978, p.155.

as it could not meet its original debts, Poland simply borrowed more and more. Poland has continued its fall into a rapid spiral of increased borrowing; of cutbacks in the purchases of Western technology and raw materials necessary to finish the factories already started or to keep existing factories going; and of exporting the goods most in demand on the domestic markets. The situation is worsened by the dependence of Polish industry on oil and natural gas which Poland must import and the dependence on Poland's rich coal deposits for hard currency earnings. As the Soviet Union has increasingly edged the price of its energy exports to the bloc countries toward world prices, and Poland has needed to export more coal to generate hard currency, cutbacks have been made in power to fuel factories and homes.

To make matters worse, Poland tried to turn to the agricultural sector to help bail itself out. Yet no serious attempts were made to fully develop Polish agriculture, and the agricultural situation is truly disastrous. No significant and consistent investment has been made in Polish agriculture since the land was almost totally decollectivized in the mid-1950s. In the 1970s, the migration of young agricultural workers to the cities left farming to an aging population which is less and less productive. Government purchase prices have not been adjusted to meet the rising costs of agricultural production. It often costs more to raise livestock in Poland than the government pays for it. The peasantry has, therefore, turned increasingly to subsistence and private market production. What farmers are commissioned to produce by the government is exported to meet some of Poland's debt to the West. And if agricultural disaster was not already guaranteed by government

policy, Poland has suffered three successive seasons of bad weather culminated by the heavy snow and flooding in 1979 and this year's cold, rainy summer, which has destroyed most of the planned grain harvest. Serious food shortages are the visible result.

The hardships imposed by Poland's economic problems are apparent to anyone who has tried to buy food in Poland: the shelves of Polish stores are empty. The deprivation is further magnified by the promises of prosperity made in the early seventies, the rapid increases in wages, and the growing pressure for increased worker productivity. Thus, the initial hope of gaining popular legitimacy through economic programs (of making improvements in the market and service sectors of the economy and of making promises of long-term rewards, such as cars, housing, and luxury goods, sound real) has been dashed. One article censored in 1976 gives dramatic evidence of how Poles live:

The father and eldest son work to support the family but, after analyzing the budget, the mother feels she must get a job. According to the mother of this working class family of four in Warsaw: "In January our income was 5,029 zloties, which means 59 zloties were left over. In May, there was a loan of 10,000 to 13,000 zloties for 'major expenses,' so we got 20 dekagrams of chocolate, slacks for 450 zloties, two pairs of slippers, a man's shirt, an extension cord, deluxe sour cream, one visit to the dentists' cooperative, and hand-cream.

"Of course, we eat black pudding and blood sausage. But, our son says right away, 'What are you giving me, animal feed?', and he recalls what the black pudding of another time tasted like. So, to do something nice, father gets up at 4:00 a.m. and takes the tram to the private market on Polna or a butcher shop near by. Unfortunately, he is often too late. Various people have been standing in line in front of the shop since three or four in the morning." [8]

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[8] M. Wesolowska, "There Is Enough Sun," censored from Polityka, No. 28, July 8, 1976, as reported in Censors' Information No. 55, an internal report put out by the Central Office for the Control of the

All available evidence indicates that the situation has declined still further since 1976.

The failures of the Gierek program have been equally dramatic in the area of social services. According to one of the internal reports done by Polish academics, journalists, and specialists in 1960, nearly one-third of the national investment went into "nonproductive sectors" of the economy, such as education, health care, social services, recreation and athletics. Now, the proportion has fallen to 19%.[9]

Higher education has been subjected to severe cutbacks. Now, not only are there fewer resources available for educational development, but there are fewer places for qualified students. As a result, getting a place in a university depends far more on connections than on academic or even political qualifications. Despite the growing demand for housing, construction has declined and apartments have become more expensive.[10] Such basic necessities as furniture and telephones are scarce. Even medical care is in short supply. Medicines are often either not available or available only for hard currency. In an attempt to save energy, regularly scheduled planes and trains are often cancelled, and electricity is cut off to whole regions for hours.

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Press, Publications, and Public Performances, Warsaw, July 9, 1976.

[9] Experience and the Future of Poland.

[10] Roman Stefanowski, "Poland's Housing Record and Prospects," Radio Free Europe Research, June 13, 1980.

VII

The seriousness of Poland's economic problems, the Gierek policies which have undermined whatever authority the Party had, and the new dependence of Poland on both the East and the West have obscured dramatic changes in key sectors of Poland's social fabric: the new population majority, the Church, and the dissenters. It is the changes in these areas which will ultimately determine the overarching parameters for change in Poland.

Not since World War II has the character of the population changed so much. Now the majority of Poland's adult population are from postwar generations that know nothing but socialist Poland. They have a different perspective than those who built "socialist Poland" after the War. The bitterness of the destruction by Germany during World War II and domination by the Soviet Union during the Stalinist period, as well as the exhilaration and frustration of freedom and liberalization in 1956, are only vague history for adults in their twenties and thirties. For them, Poland is communist. Most have not known political repression. For those who came of age in the seventies or who will come of age in the eighties, Poland is Gierek's Poland--a society of high expectations and achievement but unequal rewards.

This generation is more politically cynical than preceding generations. Their cynicism is self-interested, not anti-communist. For the thousands who have been able to travel and work in the West because of Gierek's liberal passport policy, the West no longer seems like the alternate paradise that it did in the fifties and sixties--work is hard, prices are high, and social services are not free. For them, the West

is a quick financial fix which temporarily helps them get ahead at home. Poland, on the other hand, they see as a system which should and has provided for them. The system has provided them, "as it should," according to more than one young Pole, with education, medical care, and cheap student rates for travel and culture. It has also promised them that housing, cars and Western goods will be theirs in the not too distant future.

For most of this younger generation, Party membership is a way to get ahead professionally and personally, not a way to further socialism. Professions are selected for their social status and material rewards rather than for their social or political role.[11] Survival in the system is not a matter of "to each according to his ability" or even "to each according to his needs" but "to each according to his position and connections."

At the present time, this generation is busy establishing itself--marrying, having children, finding housing, and settling into permanent jobs. This, in itself, is all-consuming. The need to survive and get settled, as well as the possibility that the leaders' promises might come true, precludes their taking the risk of joining an organized opposition and openly battling the system. They assume that cars, apartments, and luxury goods will come to them through their parents' pull or their own connections as their educations and jobs often did. Young workers and peasants are in a worse situation. But they are as cynical. They know that their options are still greater than those of their

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[11] Maurice D. Simon, "Polish Student Attitudes and Ideological Policy" in M. Simon and Roger Kanet, Polish Policy Making, New York: Praeger, 1980.

parents. And, they have had less contact than their parents did with their peers in other social groups. They know that, whether they work or not, they will be paid and cared for. They also know that a little pressure or unrest brings rewards.

The strikes and the concessions, if they are fulfilled, cannot help but increase this new majority's willingness to refuse to make sacrifices "for the good of Poland." If the economic concessions are not fully enacted and the economic situation deteriorates further, it will certainly make these young adults even more politically cynical and self-interested. Either way, it is unlikely that ideology or force will work to mobilize the seventies' generation to defer immediate gratification for long-term gains. This cannot help but sabotage any real reform efforts.

As the possibilities for discussion in the mass media and for real reform dimmed in Poland, the only public dissident movement in the Soviet bloc blossomed. The Committee to Protect the Workers and the groups which have splintered away from it began in 1976 in response to the firing and jailing of the workers who participated in the June 1976 price riots.

Once Gierek announced an amnesty for the workers who had been involved in the riots, the Committee turned from the limited concern of aiding workers jailed in the June riots to coordinating and aiding the worker, student, and intellectual groups which had sprung up in its wake. The Committee has become a steering group to provide loose guidance and funding for the plethora of publications, representing a variety of political views, social groups and interests, and the under-

ground courses which were begun in 1978 to deal with historical and political subjects ignored in official university programs. In 1977, peasant Self-Help Committees formed in villages near major industrial centers to oppose a government proposal for a social security tax on the peasantry. After their formation, the Self-Help Committees affiliated and sought aid from the intellectuals in the Committee to Protect the Workers.

In spite of their contacts with workers and peasants, the dissident organizations have never had more than a tiny formal membership of prewar leaders, former 1968 student activists, and university students. Wider involvement in dissident activities has consisted mainly of reading underground publications and offering financial or other support by residents of the major urban centers of Warsaw and Cracow. Nowhere have workers been leaders of these organizations. In part, this limited membership has been a deliberate attempt of dissidents to stay within the letter of the law and maintain control over their movement. It also reflects the disinterest of the "new majority" of young workers and peasants in taking the risks of active organized dissent.

Although Lech Walesa and some of the other Gdansk strike leaders had had contact with the workers' groups involved with the Committee to Protect the Workers, this seems to have been a result of the fact that many of these leaders had been fired for their actions in 1970-1971 and the Committee had given them support. It does not seem to be an indication of widespread worker participation in these intellectual organizations. In fact, less than a year ago, the organizations were worried that, since they had not been able to deliver any real relief, they were

losing their contact with the population at large. This, in spite of the fact that none of their demands is specific to the limited membership of the dissident movement. Neither have the demands of the main groups been revolutionary, anti-socialist, or anti-Soviet.

In conversations, letters to journals and government institutions, and critiques by established Party and nonparty intellectuals, similar criticisms are made of the society. The most stunning examples of this are the critiques done by a group of journalists, academics, and professionals that originally organized, with the support of Stefan Olszowski, a discussion club called "Experience and the Future of Poland." After an initial meeting in January 1979, that was attended by three Central Committee officials, the group was forbidden to meet again. The steering committee has since done two surveys of the opinions of intellectuals on the problems in Poland and the potential solutions to these problems. (Since the strikes, regular meetings have begun.) That critique echoed the demands of the dissidents in even more stark terms than they themselves have used.

The paramount goal has been for an increase in information and open discussion of issues. This is articulated in the Church's demand for radio and television time to broadcast masses and for the opportunity to develop a mass Catholic press. It is also articulated by workers, peasants, and intellectuals alike in their demands for full information about the actual state of the economy and the policy process. It is acted out in the widespread use of underground publications and underground university courses as sources of information among those who have had access to them. Since the dissidents almost all recognize that

censorship of the legal media cannot be abolished, they have used their own journals to provide information and to activate citizens to discuss issues and press for participation in decisions affecting their own lives.

Coupled with this, there has been an emphasis on establishing ordered structures for rule and participation, not to totally decentralize the economy or the government, but to limit the authority of the bureaucracy to administration and to start to develop viable, low level institutions for citizen participation. To move toward this goal, dissident organizations have tried to provide avenues and guidance to citizens so that they can and will be critical and feel their own strength.

Finally, dissident groups have pointed out the need for a greater recognition and representation of groups in the society. At the same time, they have attacked the inequality in the system. Their aim is not an egalitarian society but one in which goods and services are distributed not on the basis of "pull and connections" but on some more rational basis recognizing the needs of different groups.

The key force in the development, success, and future of dissent in Poland has been, ironically, the Catholic hierarchy. Without the support and protection of the Church, it is doubtful that the movement could have grown as it did. After the Committee to Protect the Workers was formed, priests were active members, churches were used for hunger strikes and meetings, and the hierarchy provided support through pastoral letters and private letters to the secular leadership. Surprisingly, since Karol Wojtyla's trip to Poland, the Church has been less

willing to continue this alliance, and returned to its previous twenty year pattern of avoiding involvement with the radical left. For when the dissidents' strongest advocate in the Catholic hierarchy returned to visit his homeland, he warned that the Church had to protect its own interests first. His visit also stimulated increased opportunities for Church-state cooperation.

At the time, it seemed that the workers' strikes of the summer and the information link that the dissident leaders provided might have been a major breakthrough in dissident-worker contacts. It could also have reradicalized the Catholic Church. In the end, however, it seems that the workers' own strength and their unwillingness to make government attacks on the dissidents a major cause may make it far easier for the government to act against the dissident movements. What Gierek had long feared--that if he tried to put the dissidents down he would spark a major conflagration--proved not to be the case. The Church hierarchy ultimately made it clear that, faced with the possibility of anarchy or a potential invasion, it would call for order and restraint.

The legacy of the new dissent which organized in the mid-seventies may not be in the permanent organizations which have been established and the strong leadership that they have provided. Rather it may be in the first initial cooperation between the Church hierarchy and the left dissenters. It may also be in the reincarnation of old Polish traditions of alternative societies existing more or less openly under repressive regimes. This reincarnation, more than the actions of the various dissident groups themselves, may be one of the key factors which will make it impossible for any Polish leadership to really penetrate and mobilize the society in support of national Party goals.

VIII

The future course of Polish events and the future of Poland itself has not yet been charted. The leadership is caught in a maze with exits already blocked off by the legacy of the past or guarded by outside gatekeepers. Poland does not control. In fact, given the age of the Soviet leadership and a conservative Republican victory in the United States, some of the gatekeepers themselves are unknowns.

Unlike the upheavals which at least temporarily changed the course of Polish politics in 1956 and 1970, the upheavals in 1980 represented a far deeper malaise which cannot be cured by a new leadership and temporary gains by the population. They are part of a silent collapse into

apathy, indifference, boredom, and stagnation in every area with sporadic explosions of violent action. This moral and intellectual crisis can only harm Poland further economically.[12]

Such a collapse has been apparent since 1976, according to the Party and non-Party intellectuals who organized Experience and the Future of Poland in 1978. Solutions to the collapse are far more difficult. In fact, attacking one area of the problem will merely make a solution more difficult to achieve in another area.

The resolution of the workers' demands did not end the Polish leadership's problems. It increased them. The leaders gave away all their potential economic gains by giving in to workers' demands for wage increases. Even more serious, any recognition by the population that there must be sacrifices in order to pay back the national debt has been

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[12] Experience and the Future of Poland Report.

countered by the evidence that those who take to the streets are exempt from those sacrifices. So, consumer communism triumphed at the very time when there is nothing to consume. Furthermore, no specific mention has been made to workers about increasing productivity. In the agreements with striking coal miners, for example, the government had to make concessions which will most probably reduce the miners productivity.

By making massive concessions before the Party is taken seriously or difficult economic reforms have been made, the leadership has severely limited its possibilities of actually putting reforms into effect. After all, decentralization and price reforms require workers to accept short-term losses in exchange for the promise of long-term gains once the economy has been righted. In Hungary, that happened only after the workers had been broken by the Soviet invasion. In Poland, an invasion would bring far more destruction.

Finally, although the rampant corruption which has become a way of life in Poland has demoralized the Party and the society, any move to end it at the mass level will only increase the inability of the population to satisfy its needs. The attacks and revelations which are beginning within the Party leadership on those who have used their offices for personal gain are necessary if the Party is ever to be more than a mafia of thieves. But in the course of the cleansing and fault finding, they can only add fuel to the fires of popular disgust for the Party and its leadership.

What Poland must have immediately is a transfusion of loans and credits to satisfy some of the consumer demand which was whetted by the concessions. So far, the United States and the Soviet Union have

responded to the struggles in 1980 by scrambling to extend credit to relieve the economic pressures in Poland and, thereby, reduce the possibility of a national revolt which would open the option for Soviet intervention. That is palatable to no one--the West, the Soviets, the Polish leadership, the Church hierarchy, or the population. But, it remains a real possibility if the Polish leadership and population are not able to cooperate peacefully to resolve Poland's difficulties by making mutual concessions and sacrifices. In the workers' heady mood of victory and the leadership's disarray, this will be a major achievement.

Ironically, although Western European nations have far more committed to Poland in terms of loans and connections between the populations, they have been slow to act to bail Poland out this time. They have sought ways to lessen the economic risks they must take to help Poland and have pressed the United States to take the lead, since it so far has the least committed. The political ramifications of this shift from dependence on Western Europe to a greater dependence on the superpowers are serious. Poland will no longer find it so easy to say, as one of the leading formulators of Polish foreign policy did in February, 1980:

We must preserve what we have developed here in Europe. I believe that not just the governments here in Europe, but the nations have examined how useful detente policy is for Europe. This is not a game just for politicians. And, therefore, it seems to me, despite the tensions we have observed between Moscow and Washington, we still have some leeway. "We" meaning the small and medium sized European states.[13]

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[13] West German (ARD) Television interview with M. Rakowski, February 10, 1980.

Yet Poland cannot count on emergency loans forever. There is a very real possibility that the leadership in both the Soviet Union and the United States will swing to the right. If this occurs, there will certainly be less willingness on either side to continue the flexibility toward Poland that detente insured. A more conservative Soviet leadership will probably pressure Kania to control the population rather than to simply muddle through. A more conservative American leadership might be less willing to extend further aid to Poland or to encourage Western Europe to continue to give Poland the economic leeway it needs most: more extended credit and rescheduling of debt. All of this would put the Polish leadership in a position of having to deliver the impossible from a population schooled in consumerism, not in order and sacrifice. If Kania rides out the current storm and gets continued tacit support from the United States and the Soviet Union, he is likely to remain as First Secretary for the next few years. The evolution toward an increasingly controlled but isolated Party and an increasingly alienated population, which knows that the leadership has no real power, would allow the current leaders to keep their positions and provide for themselves. But it would not allow Poland to do more than keep afloat economically without increasing efficiency, decreasing demands, or repaying the principal on Western debts. What the leadership would do in this scenario is simply continue to cope with day to day problems and give in to all demands without changing the de jure structures or rules of the game or worry about future implications. This it has done for the last ten years.

The final and least likely scenario is for Poland to blossom forth politically and economically. No one, not even the dissidents, expects this to happen. Poland is not now in a position to make dramatic economic changes. Nor are the new leaders reformers. Even the dissidents themselves have said that the population must first be schooled to take responsibility and participate before it can take its own destiny in hand. The summer of strikes was certainly good schooling in the value of participation, but not in the realities of responsibility. The effect of the new unions and the new press openness has yet to be shown.

Whatever the pressures placed by the West and the Soviet Union on Poland, the question for Poland in the 1980s seems to be: What happens to a nation with little hope for real change?

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