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Summary: A series of hunger strikes and riots in Polish prisons since April of this year has drawn public interest to this little known aspect of the Polish scene, and details of the penitentiary system are being published ever more freely in the press. Other concerns have been the continuing supply shortages and the increasing unwillingness of farmers to sell food. Meanwhile, parcels reaching Poland from abroad continue to rot in storage. Only self-management is believed capable of bringing Poland out of the current chaos, but how can this be achieved with the immutable party apparatus? All this time, tens of thousands of Poles are leaving for the West to ensure a decent standard of living for themselves and their families. The immobility of the past year continues, with everyone giving advice and hardly anyone doing anything practical. These were some of the main themes of the Polish press in November.

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In its weekend issue of 27-29 November 1981, the party daily for the younger generation, Sztandar Mlodych, published some findings (from a 60-page report that had been sent to the Sejm and to the Ministry of Justice) prepared over a period of two years by groups of students about the Polish penitentiary system. Since the first riot in the Wronki prison in April (a riot that was put down violently, including a "health trip" during which recaptured prisoners were beaten by the guards with the aid of the prison doctor), there have been hunger strikes and riots in more than 70 Polish prisons. The prisons are overcrowded, antiquated (most dating back to the last century), without basic facilities (several have no running water and sewage, including a notorious women's prison in Grudziadz where some women prisoners give birth to children), and are run by a primitive and brutal prison service (no one wants to be a prison guard). These are only a few of the findings. Gazeta Olsztynska of November 9 published a dramatic report about the riot in Kamiensk, where two prisoners were killed, several people, including attacking militiamen,

injured, and the whole place set on fire. The quelling of the riot was again combined with the beating of prisoners after they had given themselves up. Gazeta Krakowska of November 16 describes the riot and a press conference in the Ministry of Justice during which the deputy minister tried to blame the press for spreading dissatisfaction and insubordination among prisoners. The journalists present protested violently and asked many inconvenient questions.

One of the reasons for the overcrowding of prisons is the extremely severe penal code. According to official statements, the prison in Kamiensk is for recidivists, but such "hardened criminals" may well include someone who stole, admittedly, for the second time, two bottles of milk and got a ten-month sentence. The illustrated weekly of the Polish Students' Association, itd of November 9 brought up this fact and many other dubious aspects of the penitentiary in an interview with a student member of the Polish Penitentiary Association, recently founded to offer aid to prisoners and provide some sort of social supervision of the system. There is a second such association, Patronat, founded in 1903 to aid Poles in czarist prisons, closed down in 1947 as "superfluous under the socialist system," but also recently reopened.

Another dramatic episode was described in Glos Wybrzeza of November 23. A man arrived by taxi at the party headquarters in Gdansk holding a hand grenade and demanding to see the first party secretary. Since this was a Sunday morning, it took several hours to locate him; in the meantime the militia carefully avoided provoking the man. The area was blocked off for hours, until the Gdansk First Party Secretary Tadeusz Fiszbach arrived and agreed to talk to the man personally, provided he put away his hand grenade:

When Tadeusz Fiszbach appeared as announced, the man got out of the taxi. He halted at the door, pushed the safety catch back on the hand grenade, went back several steps, placed the grenade on the curb, and walked toward the first secretary. They met near the main door of the Voivodship Committee Building. Tadeusz suggested that they go in and talk, to which the man agreed.

It then transpired that the man had been trying to get permission to build a home for his family (a wife and two children) on a plot made available to him by his brother, but had been denied permission. He is now living in a house with his brother's family and two other families. He apologized for causing such trouble but said he was desperate. His case was referred to the state prosecutor. (1)

Polish farmers employ no violent means, at worst they occupy some public building, to draw attention to the failure to satisfy their demands. As Lech Bedkowski in Zycie i Nowoczesnosc (the weekend supplement to Zycie Warszawy) of November 19 put it, after farm work had been taken care of "came the autumn, a season for peasant demands."

- (1) Both this "High Noon" encounter and the description of the riot in Kamiensk, as published in Gazeta Olsztynska, are a novelty in the Polish press, since they are very direct and thrilling accounts, rather than being couched in officialese.

The most recent cause of peasant unrest is the fact that regardless of the amount of money they have, they cannot buy anything, least of all the farm machinery, tools, and feed they so desperately need. Yet, little is being done. In fact, the authorities decided that a purchase-sale "tie-in" would be introduced, whereby a farmer could buy specially diverted products but only for one-fifth of the money he was paid for deliveries to a state procurement office. Farmers insist on a one-to-one exchange.

The same Zycie i Nowoczesnosc of November 12 described a special drive it organized in the Bialystok region, where even a promise of deliveries of goods needed for farming resulted in double the amount of livestock being brought into the procurement office, although the ratio was one to three. This, the paper states, was a one-shot campaign and something more must be done to win the confidence of farmers who have been duped over decades. Furthermore, the choice of goods offered for sale on special conditions in the countryside is frequently badly selected; as a headline in Polityka of November 28 on the same subject put it: "You Cannot Plow a Field with a Washing Machine."

At the same time, nothing is being done de facto to make it possible for private enterprise to do anything at all to alleviate the lot of millions of Polish citizens, as Leszek Chmielowski complains in another article on the subject in Zycie i Nowoczesnosc of November 19. He starts by citing an example, symbolic, the baker: "Bread from a private bakery was frequently tastier, but it meant class alienation." Private enterprise has been destroyed once and for all, and lots of guarantees and good will are required on the part of the authorities, hundreds of rules must be changed, before thousands of small private workshops surround the industrial giants and begin to produce what the people require.

At the end of November the new bill on education was submitted to the Sejm (and immediately passed on for study by special commissions, with results expected by the end of January), and all the while student sit-in strikes were taking place throughout the country. Polityka of November 28 published a personal report by Anna Malatowska about a visit to striking Warsaw Polytechnic students, a sensitive and friendly overview with two outstanding quotations. An anonymous student said: "socialism was supposed to be designed for the human being, but it is, instead, designed to destroy the individual," and a remark allegedly made by the dean of Warsaw University: "A situation in which academe thinks it must strike is a misery. It brings to mind the self-immolation of Buddhist monks, who chose that way to protest."

In a conversation with Zycie Warszawy, dated November 25, Dr. Andrzej Piekara, deputy chairman of the Warsaw branch of the Polish Society of Political Sciences, tells of a recent meeting of lawyers, sociologists, and political scientists who discussed local self-government at the beginning of November. He said that the incompatibility of local self-management and a centrally managed policy has been proved too often for this system to continue. The

central office always comes out on top. New elections are expected to take place on the people's council level in "February or somewhat later," as he put it [in fact, it is not settled at all when such an election will take place], and, ideally, they should be preceded by a new law and new electoral regulations:

Candidates should be presented in a possibly pluralistic way, which does not necessarily mean a multiparty system. The point is that candidates should be put up by civic groups, i.e.; both political and social organizations, socioeconomic unions, or labor unions. People know each other on that level; generally they know "who is who." . . . It is a question of [real] elections not just of voting.

In Polityka of November 28, Andrzej Krzysztof Wroblewski sees a worsening social climate, the stiffening of fronts both in the party and in Solidarity. The headline of the article is "Blood -- The Oil of History?" and he explains it in the text:

If Poland is to survive (let alone pull itself up!), if we do not want to oil the wheels of history with our own blood, the bipolar system must become more complicated, so as to correspond more closely to the true map of society. . . . If the coalition and the front of understanding are to become more than an empty phrase, the bipolar system, based on organizational loyalty and unity, must give way to a tripolar one. Between the radical and mistrustful camps a strong center must emerge, able to stabilize and "amortize" the violent moves of the other two.

Dr. Jozef Kossecki is the head of the proudly named Institute of Social Cybernetics. More prosaically, he admits, he also runs the Teachers' College in Kielce. His special field is propaganda and manipulation, however, and he has had several books published, in which he computerizes social attitudes, particularly social motivations. This colorful personality has been interviewed repeatedly, and in Glos Wybrzeza of November 16, he blames the party press for failure to ask his advice ("the President of the US and the pope are not ashamed to ask for advice from specialists") and thus not being aware of the fact that the Poles are motivated very strongly by ethical and ideological considerations, and very little by economic or legal ones. His cybernetical calculations have also enabled Dr. Kossecki to come to the conclusion, as expressed in an interview with Sztandar Mlodych of November 27-29, that the West, and in particular West Germany, is determined to colonialize Poland and did so by cleverly manipulating Gierek and his team who, "possibly even consciously," aided this process by going into debt and overselling Polish coal, and buying antiquated licenses that made Poland ever more dependent on the West. And now the rug has been pulled out from under their feet, all because no one listens to social cyberneticists.

The scandal of parcels from abroad lying in heaps and rotting away for months on end is being raised in the entire press. The blame is squarely put on the post office, which allegedly refuses outside help. Yet, the post office cannot make such decisions on its own. This situation has led a columnist in Slowo Powszechne of November 26 to write dramatically:

Possibly someone is especially interested in trying to make us bow our stiff necks and to make Poles fall on their knees before empty shops, in the hope that, totally exhausted, the nation will finally understand that no foreign aid can help it. I am not saying that such are the true intentions of the people right at the top, those responsible for People's Poland. But surely they must know that the rank-and-file bureaucratic apparatus under their control more or less consciously is reducing matters to the sort of nonsensical situation that can no longer be tolerated.

Slowo Powszechne of November 25 writes about tens of thousands of Poles who have managed to get a passport and then decided to remain abroad for economic reasons:

Poles, like all citizens of the overwhelming majority of states in the world, should have the right to free movement across borders not only for purposes of tourism but also when they intend to leave with their families to work abroad for good. And they should also have the right to return to their country when they want to.

What happens when someone returns home willingly after several months abroad was presented in a letter to the editor in Polityka (November 28) by the noted poet, Wiktor Woroszyński:

Welcome Home!

After a lengthy stay abroad, I returned to Poland on November 10. I was afraid I would not recognize my country, but I recognized it at once: I was greeted, as in the good old days, by a thorough search of my luggage and the confiscation ("deposit") of all the books found by the customs officer, including two of my own, published in Paris and London at a time when I was forbidden by Lukaszewicz to have them published at home. . . . What a relief that was, in a period of so many changes, that here and there, carefully preserved, one finds old methods, old instructions, possibly even old lists of citizens to be given special consideration (I was the only one so tenderly handled in the whole railroad car).

So I was no longer surprised when, a few days later, an official from the local militia office, where I brought back my passport and picked up my identity card, asked me severely how I explained my extended stay abroad (obviously, she mistrusted the competence of the consulate that granted me such an extension) and then asked about my education and place of employment.

For all those months, when I was not submitting to similar questioning, searches, and "deposits" (and once, when crossing from Germany into France they, horrors!, failed to look at my papers altogether), I felt very peculiar, and obviously something was missing from my life.

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