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Pol

X/9 P -- MILITARY AUTHORITIES IN POLAND ATTEMPT TO PACIFY UNIVERSITIES

Munich, 17 December 1981 (RAD/Sabbat)

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The state of martial law proclaimed in Poland on Sunday has not spared the universities: the last remaining strikes were reportedly broken up and their leaders were taken into custody, lectures were discontinued as the students' Christmas vacation was brought forward, and army teaching staff invested with "the necessary powers" were detailed to "supervise the security of the schools." Now Minister of Science, Higher Education, and Technology Jerzy Nawrocki has apparently handed in his resignation. (1)

The student strike action had been in progress since mid-November, when a dispute that arose originally out of the undemocratic re-election on October 27 of Michal Hebda, the authoritarian Rector of the Radom Higher School of Engineering, turned into a national protest action over government ill will and incompetence in implementing the new higher education legislation. The action, which was organized by the Independent Students' Union (ISU), founded in the wake of the August 1980 agreements and legally registered in February of this year after a national students' strike centered on Lodz, involved at its peak 70 of the country's 91 colleges of higher education and some 15% of the entire student population. The students were demanding that a draft academic reform bill, which was elaborated by a "social codification commission" after much argument, concession, and compromise, eventually accepted almost unanimously by the academic community and submitted to the government on June 11, be passed on to the Sejm for discussion and voting in its original version without the 180 or so ministerial "amendments," the effect of which would have been virtually to nullify the reform and whittle down substantially the universities' promised autonomy, perpetuating, on the contrary, their subservience to the government's primarily economic interests.

The students' cause was supported by Solidarity, the Church, and by Poland's leading intellectuals, as well as teaching staff and academic authorities who were in the vanguard of academic reform, to name only the post-August Rector of Warsaw University, Henryk Samsonowicz, a Solidarity member liked and respected by his students. In face of such a united front the government was forced to yield, and on November 22 it sent the original draft bill to the Sejm with its amendments attached as "remarks." Nonetheless, the students lacked confidence in the government's good intentions and determined to keep up the pressure on the government while the bill received its reading by continuing their protest action in the form of active strikes, in other words, organizing lectures on topics outside of the normal curricula, particularly on modern history in the light of current events.

In the meantime, a new conflict arose at the Firefighter Officers' Academy in Warsaw. Its students demanded civilian status for their school, as this would bring them under the jurisdiction of the Higher Education Ministry and within the scope of the new legislation, as opposed to military status, which would mean their subservience to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its authoritarian regulations. In this case Prime Minister and PUPP First Secretary Wojciech Jaruzelski moved quickly, ordering the forceful eviction of the strikers and the closure of the school, the first instance of the use of force by a joint army-police operation since August 1980.

(1) Radio Warsaw, 15 December 1981.

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Some of the firemen joined the national students' strike at the Warsaw Technical University and their cause was added to the students' other grievances. The ministry continued to ignore the protests, putting them down to the ISU leaders' overgrown political ambitions and insisting that the Radom conflict be settled internally. As the national situation became increasingly perilous the students were exhorted to end their strike by Solidarity, the Primate of Poland, Archbishop Jozef Glemp, and the rectors of higher education colleges who pledged in return to take upon themselves the responsibility for furthering the cause and monitoring developments. The decisive step proved to be the guarantee given to the ISU by the Conference of Rectors which, on December 11, constituted itself as a permanent and formal body and took it upon itself to make decisions on higher education and to solve conflicts independently of the minister and the Main Council of Science wherever the need arose, in view of the minister's obvious inability to do so. After the state of martial law was proclaimed the Conference of Rectors was dissolved by the Military Council of National Salvation as having "attempted to usurp some of the prerogatives of the state." (2) The council expressed the conviction that, as the situation stabilized, the interests of higher education would be adequately protected by the new legislation.

According to fragmentary and unverifiable information reaching the West, there have been many arrests among students, teaching staff, and academics, including those with no known militant activities. (3) Participants in a sit-in at the Polish Academy of Sciences were evicted by force. (4) The national Chairman of the ISU, Jaroslaw Guzy, is known to have been detained, as was the chairman of the local Warsaw University branch of that union, Zbigniew Rykowski. (5) The official Polish media have spoken of "sporadic incidents" at colleges of higher education since then. The radio reported that normal research work was continuing in colleges as most students had left for the vacation and only medical students had been directed to help out in hospitals. The regime radio claimed that

The convulsed and emotion-torn student community is calming down, which does not mean, of course, that all the young people have sobered up. This process is being hindered . . . by a group of ISU activists. Attempts to incite the student population as well as secondary school pupils have been observed in Lodz. (6)

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(2) Ibid.

(3) Jean Guisnel, Libération, 16 December 1981.

(4) AP, 16 December 1981.

(5) Los Angeles Times, 15 December 1981.

(6) Radio Warsaw, 15 December 1981.

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The students were accused of circulating Solidarity leaflets calling for strikes. The same report spoke of student unrest in Cracow and said that protests in Wroclaw had been terminated. The next day it was announced that three philosophy students, members of the ISU at Warsaw University, had been arrested for putting up posters with "false information" aimed at sowing "public disorder." (7) According to the latest information, students have begun sit-in protests at two Warsaw churches, the university Church of St. Anne, and the Holy Cross Church, from where the Sunday Mass has been broadcast since the August 1980 agreement. (8) F-676

The resignation of Nawrocki as Minister of Science, Higher Education, and Technology in the light of all these events is something of a puzzle. Before his appointment to this post on July 3 he had been a lecturer in mining and then Rector of the Silesian Technical University in Gliwice and he had served as the Chairman of the Sejm Commission on Science and Technological Progress. His appointment had initially been greeted as a possible change for the better as he replaced Janusz Gorski, a man who had antagonized the students and who was responsible for the amendments to the higher education bill. Unfortunately, during his short period in office he proved totally ineffective. Whether his departure is an authentic resignation in protest at the mass detentions of academic personnel or whether it amounts, in fact, to a dismissal expected to serve as a sop to the students and teachers, as a kind of good will gesture to buy their support and prevent them from joining the workers in resistance to the military authorities, is open to speculation. One may only guess that Nawrocki's successor will be replaced by yet another uniformed minister to ensure order and discipline in the universities.

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(7) Ibid., 16 December 1981.

(8) Reuter, 16 December 1981.